# THE LION'S MOUSE

C.N. & A.M. WILLIAMSON

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# BY C. N. & A. M. WILLIAMSON

**FRONTISPIECE BY**
**HARRY STACEY BENTON**

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***Suddenly he became conscious of a perfume, and saw a young and beautiful woman hovering at the door.***
***'Oh, do help me!' she said.***

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# THE LION'S MOUSE

# I

## THE LION

Roger Sands had steel-gray eyes, a straight black line of brows drawn low and nearly meeting above them, thick black hair lightly powdered with silver at the temples, and a clean-shaven, aggressive chin. He had the air of being hard as nails. Most people, including women, thought him hard as nails. He thought it of himself, and gloried in his armour, never more than on a certain September day, when resting in the Santa Fé Limited, tearing back to New York after a giant's tussle in California. But—it was hot weather, and he had left the stateroom door open. Everything that followed came—from this.

Suddenly he became conscious of a perfume, and saw a woman hovering, rather than standing, at the door. At his look she started away, then stopped.

"Oh, do help me!" she said.

She was young and very beautiful. He couldn't stare quite as coldly as he ought.

"What can I do for you?" was the question he asked.

He had hardly opened his mouth before she flashed into the stateroom and shut the door.

"There's a man.... I'm afraid!"

Though she was young and girlish, and spoke impulsively, there was something oddly regal about her. Princesses and girl-queens ought to be of her type; tall and very slim, with gracious, sloping shoulders and a long throat, the chin slightly lifted: pale, with great appealing violet eyes under haughty brows, and quantities of yellow-brown hair dressed in some sort of Madonna style.

"You needn't be afraid," he said. "Men aren't allowed to insult ladies in trains."

"This man hasn't insulted me in an ordinary way. But I'm in dreadful danger. American men are good to women, even strangers. You can save my life, if you will—or more than my life. But there's only one way." Her words came fast, on panting breaths, as though she had been running. The girl had stood at first, her

hand on the door-knob, but losing her balance with a jerk of the train, she let herself fall into the seat. There she sat with her head thrown wearily back, her eyes appealing to the eyes that looked down at her.

A queer fancy ran through the man's brain. He imagined that a woman being tried for her life might look at the judge with just that expression. "What do you mean?" asked Sands.

He had resisted the jerk of the train, and was still on his feet. Instead of answering his question, the girl begged him to sit down.

"I can't think properly while it seems as if you were waiting to turn me out," she said.

Sands sat down.

"I hardly know how to tell you what I mean. I hardly dare," the voice went on, while he wondered. "It's a tremendous thing to ask. I can't explain ... and if I hesitate it will be too late. I don't know your name, or your character, except what I judge from your face. The way to save me is to keep me in this stateroom with the door shut, as far as Chicago."

"Good heavens! That's...." Sands was going to end his sentence with "absolutely impossible!" But he stopped in the midst. Her eyes made him stop. It was as if he were pronouncing a death sentence. He was silent for a few seconds.

"I'd have to say ... no, I could not say you were my wife, because everyone knows I've not got a wife. I'll say you are my cousin: say you've come late. I want you to have this stateroom, and I'll take another ... or a section. I—I could do that."

"Will you?" she breathed.

"Yes. I will."

He said this almost sullenly. He was thinking: "Pretty smart new dodge! Neat way to get a stateroom all the way from Albuquerque to Chicago."

"I'll go out now and fix things up with the conductor," he promised. "We must settle on a story. You came on board at Albuquerque just now?"

"Yes. The last minute before the train started. I have a berth in this car. I thought I was safe, that everything was right for me. Then I saw the man ... not the one I

expected; worse. He wasn't in this car, but the next. I saw him standing there. He was looking at some ladies passing through. One had on deep mourning, and a crepe veil. Perhaps he believed it was I. I turned and rushed this way. Your door was open, and you ... you looked like a real man. That's all."

"What about your baggage?"

"I have nothing. I ... was in a hurry."

"In what name did you make your reservation?"

"Miss Beverley White. White isn't my real name: Beverley is ... one of my names. I can't tell you more."

"All right. The porter will get some toilet things for my cousin whom I'm to chaperon from Albuquerque to Chicago, and who nearly missed the train owing to illness. He'll bring your meals in, as you're not able to leave your stateroom."

"That's what I'd have asked," she said. "I may trust the porter?"

"The porter knows me. Your idea is," he went on, his hand on the door, "that the man you don't want to see will try pretty hard to see you?"

"Yes. When he searches the train and can't find me (I'm sure he's begun the search already) he can't be certain I'm on board, but he won't give up easily. If the deepest gratitude——"

"I don't need consolation. Any other instructions to give before I leave you?"

"No. Yes ... there's one thing. Will you take charge of a very small parcel? I daren't keep it myself, in case anything unexpected should happen.

"It is inside my dress," the girl explained. For an instant she turned her back, then, rebuttoning her blouse with one hand, held out to him in the other a long, thick envelope, unaddressed, and sealed with three gold-coloured seals. Roger took the parcel.

"You see how I trust you," she said. "This packet is the most valuable thing I have in the world, yet I feel it is safe."

"You told me you didn't know my name. But if I'm your cousin you'd better know it. I'm Roger Sands——"

"Roger Sands, the great—what is the word?—corporation lawyer? The man who

saved the California Oil Trust king?" She looked surprised, almost frightened.

"It isn't a 'Trust,' or I couldn't have saved him. That was just the point."

"How lucky I am to have such a man stand by me! For you will?"

He slipped the long envelope into an inside breast pocket of his gray tweed coat. "It's as safe there as in a bank," he assured her. "Now I'll go and make everything straight. If you want me, you've only to ring for the porter and send me word. I won't come till you do send."

Whether or no her terror was justified, Roger resolved to give it the benefit of the doubt. Instead of trying to secure another stateroom, he would try to get a section close to Stateroom A, in order to play watch-dog.

It wasn't difficult to do. The section he wanted was engaged from the next stopping place, but an exchange could be made. The Pullman car conductor took it upon himself to attend to that. Sands' suitcase, coat, and magazines were arranged on both seats, and he sat down to keep guard. The porter had been told that Miss White wasn't to be disturbed unless she rang, except at meal times, when he—Sands—would choose dishes from the menu and send a waiter from the dining-car.

A few toilet things were somehow procured by the negro, and handed into Stateroom A, with a contribution of novels, magazines, and a box of chocolates, from Miss White's cousin.

Night, Roger realized, would be the dangerous time, if danger there was, and he decided not to sleep. Lying awake wasn't, after all, very difficult, for the portrait of the girl was painted on Roger's mind. He saw things in that portrait he'd seen but subconsciously in the original. He thought that her beauty was of the type which would shine like the moon, set off with wonderful clothes and jewels. And from that thought it was only a step to picture the joy of giving such clothes and jewels. The man was surprised and ashamed to find himself thrilling like a boy.

Daylight released him from duty. He dressed, and had his section made up. Though all peril—if any—had vanished with the night, Roger couldn't bring himself to leave his post for breakfast until he saw the porter tap at the door of Stateroom A in answer to a ring.

"I hope Miss White's feeling better," he said to the negro, when the door shut once more.

"Yes, sah, she wants her room fixed up. Ah'm gwan do it raight now, but Ah'm bound to give yuh the lady's message fust. She thought you'd like to heah she's mighty well, considerin'. An' she'll thank yuh, suh, to order her some coffee an' toast."

Roger added cantaloupe to the order, and a cereal with cream. The mysterious girl hidden in his stateroom was no longer an adventuress, sponging on his idiotic generosity: she was an exquisite, almost a sacred, charge. As he ate his breakfast in the dining-car he saw a man he knew sitting directly opposite him at the next table. Their eyes encountered. Roger felt that the other had been staring at him and hadn't had time to look away. He bowed, and paused at the table which he was obliged to pass on his way out.

"How do you do, O'Reilly?" he said, with a slight stiffness. He would have preferred to walk past with no more than the nod, but in that case the man would believe his late absent-mindedness had been deliberate. Roger didn't wish to leave this impression. Justin O'Reilly was nearly ten years younger than he, but had got the better of him once, and not long ago. Sands was too proud to let it seem as if the memory rankled.

O'Reilly rose and shook the offered hand. He was tall and lean, and brown-faced as a soldier back from the war. He had a boyish air, younger than his thirty-one or thirty-two years: but under that look was the same sort of hardness and keenness which was the first thing a stranger noticed about Sands.

"I'd no idea you were out west."

"It's been a flying trip," O'Reilly answered.

"Queer I missed seeing you before. Suppose you've been on board since Los Angeles?"

"I caught sight of you last night for the first time," said the other. "I'm not in your car, and I've been resting up. I came on board tired. One usually does come on board tired!"

"Yes," said Roger. "Well, we shall knock up against each other now and then, here in the diner."

"Sure to. I shall be spending a few days in New York before Washington," O'Reilly volunteered.

"Right! But don't let your coffee get cold for me." Roger passed on.

If his thoughts had not been focussed on the occupant of Stateroom A he would have wondered a good deal as to what had taken Justin O'Reilly on a "flying trip" west. This was O'Reilly's first year in Congress, and he'd man[oe]uvred to make himself a conspicuous figure in Washington one way or other. His own present interests could not, Roger thought, be interfered with by Justin O'Reilly. The man was a Democrat, and opposed on principle to the cause of John Heron, whom Miss White had called the "California Oil Trust King": but personally the two were friends, even distantly related, and O'Reilly would wish to do Heron no secret injury.

When he got back to his own car Sands found the porter waiting.

"Lady's through breakfus, suh, and would like to see yuh w'en convenient," was the message: and two seconds later Stateroom A's rightful owner was humbly knocking at the door.

The girl's beauty struck the man anew as she smiled him a welcome. She was as well groomed as if she had had a lady's maid.

"Has anything happened? Have you had any trouble on my account?" she inquired.

When Roger said no, nothing had happened, she drew a breath of relief.

"No one in any way noticeable has tried to get acquainted with you?"

"The conductor and porter and a waiter or two are the only persons I've exchanged a word with—except a fellow I know slightly, named O'Reilly, a Congressman from California. I suppose he doesn't interest you?"

"No man interests me ... unless the one who is saving my life," the girl answered surprisingly. As she spoke, a wave of rose-colour poured over her face, and she turned quickly away in confusion. Roger felt that she had blurted it out, scarcely knowing what she said until too late. Instead of liking her less, he liked her better. He brought forth the envelope to show. It had been under his pillow all night, he told her.

"I don't know what I should have done without you!" she said, with a gratitude that was almost humble. There'd be a certain blankness, Roger couldn't help seeing, when the time came to do without *her*!

"When we get to Chicago," he asked, "how can I help you there?"

"Oh, I expect to be met by a friend. I suppose I shan't see you again: but I shall never forget."

Roger Sands felt a horrid twinge of some unpleasant emotion. He loathed the "friend" who would take the girl away from him.

"But Chicago's a long way off," she said when he did not speak. "It must seem a wild story to you, but the danger I'm in ... the danger that this envelope is in ... won't be over for one minute till you've put me into my friend's hands. You will do that, won't you? You'll see me through till the last?"

"I will," said Roger.

"And meanwhile you'll come and call on me in the stateroom sometimes if you don't mind?"

Roger smiled. A silver lining began to glimmer through the cloud.

By good luck he knew no one on board save O'Reilly, who fortunately was in another car, and he hoped that few people knew him. He could not resist her invitation. He began by deciding to spend a half hour with his "invalid cousin" now and again. As through the veil of beauty he caught glimpses of something like character within, Roger felt that the mystery thickened.

The inevitable moment came. The porter was brushing men's hats and coats. Suitcases were being fastened up. The Limited was slowing down in the big station. Then, and not till then, did Miss White show herself at the door of Stateroom A. Sands, who had knocked to tell her that she had better come out, was waiting to guard her for the last time. Neither had much to say. The hope of haven had not raised the girl's spirits. As Sands gave her a hand, stepping on to the platform, he saw Justin O'Reilly, already out of the train and looking about with the air of expecting someone. O'Reilly took off his hat, with an unnecessarily cordial smile for Sands. At heart they were enemies. Roger took the smile to mean amusement at sight of his companion. He felt annoyed. Miss White was looking straight ahead, a brilliant colour staining the cheeks usually pale.

The rendezvous, she had explained to him, was at a news stand. "There!" she said, "that is where he will be. There's such a crowd, I can't see him yet."

They neared the news stand, and as "Miss White" was a tall girl whose head could be seen above the hats of average women, he expected a man to start eagerly forward. But no man separated himself from the crowd. She was beginning to look anxious: there was no flush on her cheeks now.

"Where can he be?" she said. "Something must have happened."

"Taxi broken down, perhaps," Roger tried consolation.

"Oh, if only it's nothing worse! I must just wait. But you, Mr. Sands, I oughtn't to ask...."

"You needn't," Roger cut her short. "I'm not going to desert you."

"I might have known you wouldn't. He can't be long!"

"What about the envelope? Will you have it now?" Roger asked. She had begged him to keep it until they were out of the train.

"Not yet. I daren't. You're sure it hasn't been stolen from you? Do please make certain!"

He put his hand inside his coat, and felt the envelope, which was safe, of course. "It's there, as large as life."

"Thank heaven!" she breathed.

Minutes passed: fifteen minutes; twenty; thirty. The girl was white as ashes, and dark shadows lay under her eyes. "All hope is over!" she said, as Sands glanced at his watch, when they had stood for three-quarters of an hour. "Some terrible thing has prevented him from meeting me. I don't know what's going to become of me now!"

# II

## THE NET

"You made no plan what to do if your friend didn't turn up?" Roger enquired. "Have you any other friends in Chicago?"

"Not one."

"Have you ever lived here, or stayed here?"

"No."

If he had now been capable of suspecting her, all his first suspicions of Miss Beverley White would have marshalled themselves in his brain. Nothing had happened during the whole journey to justify her fantastic story of mysterious danger. As for the wonderful envelope, who could tell that it didn't contain blank paper? But Sands had got beyond this stage. If he were a fool, he asked to be nothing better.

"Is that friend you talk of more than a friend?"

"No, only a person I trusted for reasons I can't tell you."

"I see. And you don't know what will become of you since he's failed you, and you're turned adrift in a strange town?"

"I don't know at all. I feel stunned—as if it didn't matter."

"It does matter to a girl like you, left alone without friends in a big city where you're a stranger. Have you money?"

"I had enough and more than enough for my journey here, enough to pay you back for all you've done. I expected to get more money, and to be looked after in Chicago. Perhaps I can find work."

"Do you think after all that's passed I can go coolly on my way leaving you alone in Chicago? I may be a fool, but I have another proposal to make." He paused.

She looked up as if startled.

"What do you say to marrying me and going on to New York as my wife?"

For a minute he thought she was going to faint. She seemed suddenly to become limp. She swayed a little on her feet, and he caught her arm.

"You're tired out, standing so long," he exclaimed.

"No, it's not that. Forgive me. It was almost too much, finding out the height of your goodness. Yet, 'height' is the word!"

"You'll marry me, then!" he cried.

"No," the girl answered, "I thank you with my whole heart, but I can't."

"Why ... why?" he stammered. "Unless you're married already."

"I'm not married. No man has ever been anything to me. I swear that to you! But I can't tell you any more about myself."

Roger did not speak for a minute. At last he said:

"See here, you and I have got to talk. We can't do that where we are, with people jostling us this way and that. There's one thing certain. However this ends, I'm not going to leave you alone in Chicago. We've got plenty of time. Will you let me take you to a quiet restaurant? We can thrash matters out across the table."

"Very well," she agreed.

Roger knew Chicago. When he had arranged to have his luggage put in safe keeping, he got a taxi and took the girl to a dull but good place, sure to be practically empty at that hour. They sat down at a table in a corner, and Sands ordered an oyster stew.

"Do you dislike me?" he began his catechism. "Could you like me enough to think of me as a husband, if we'd met in a conventional, society sort of way?"

"Yes, I could. I do want you to know that. You've been so splendid to me."

"So far so good, but I haven't been splendid. I've fallen in love with you. I haven't been in love before ... that is, not since I was twenty. I've never had time...."

"You haven't taken much time in doing it now!" She gave a queer little laugh with a sob in it.

"I've learned the lesson that time isn't the thing needed. I want you more than I ever wanted anything in my life, and I'll take you ... as you stand."

"You haven't stopped to think ... to count the cost," she said. "Imagine what it would be for a man like you to have a wife he knew nothing about, just a single figure cut off its background, in a picture he'd never seen. People would ask: 'Who was she?' and there'd be no answer."

"They'd not ask me that," said Roger obstinately. "And I wouldn't care what they asked each other. I'm not a society man, though I might enjoy putting my wife on the top floor. And I can do that with you if I choose! You say I'm a man of importance. I'm important enough anyhow to take the wife I want, and to put her where I want her to be."

"Yes, perhaps. But it wouldn't be only for a little while that I'd not be allowed to tell you about myself. It would be for always. You couldn't love me enough to be happy in spite of that."

"I could be happy," Roger insisted, "if you'd love me."

"I'd adore you! But...."

"Then there isn't any 'but'. I don't say I shouldn't like to know all about my wife and her people and her past. Still, I'd rather have you with a future and no past than any other woman with both. I can't do without you, and I'm going to have you ... now, to-day, as soon as I can buy a license and get a parson to make us man and wife."

"But if you should regret it?"

"I never will be sorry, if you'll do what you just said, adore me ... half as much as I'll adore you."

Her eyes gave him a beautiful answer. Roger Sands felt that nothing could make him regret the coming of such a romance into his hustling life.

This, then, was the story behind the sensation when Roger Sands came back from a short trip to California bringing a wife, a girl who had been a Miss Beverley White, a girl nobody had ever seen or heard of before.

# III

## THE MOUSE

On the same September day, in Moreton and Payntor's department store in New York, might have been seen a wisp of a girl "cheeking" a manager into giving her a situation on the strength of her being Irish.

By chance, the side door of the big Sixth Avenue shop opened for Clo Riley (her true, Irish, baptismal name was Clodagh, but she didn't think that would "go" in New York), on the day when Roger Sands' stateroom door, on the Santa Fé Limited, opened for a very different girl and for Romance. No one would have thought that they could be in the same story—the mysterious Vision and the little, sharp-faced thing from County Cork. Yet without Clo Riley it would have been another story altogether, even though, for more than six months, she and Mr. and Mrs. Roger Sands never heard each other's names, nor saw each other's faces.

It was in the April after her marriage that Mrs. Sands came upon an advertisement in a newspaper. Moreton and Payntor were making a splash about their lately started department for antique furniture. They had obtained "eight magnificent, unique pieces of satinwood furniture painted by Angelica Kaufmann, bought by a representative of Moreton and Payntor, from a titled family in England."

Beverley Sands (her husband called her "Bev") loved painted satinwood, when it was good. How she knew that things were good or bad, Roger sometimes wondered: but she did know. Roger had taken a house at Newport which had come into the market, and Beverley was picking up "beautiful pieces" with which to furnish it. The house would, they hoped, be ready to move into by June.

When she read Moreton and Payntor's advertisement, Beverley decided to see the satinwood suite and buy it if genuine. Her present wealth emphasized her astonishing, incredible happiness. "He gives me everything I want, he trusts me to do everything I like," she thought. Life was wonderful. Slowly she was coming out from under the cloud of fear, and had ceased to be afraid of Something terrible that might happen.

Roger went every morning to the offices of the firm which had his name at its head. She had breakfasted with him in a kind of super-dressing gown which Roger said was like an opal seen through a sunrise mist. As her maid hooked up her frock she sang for happiness. She wished she could earn it by making someone else happy. Roger didn't count in that way. The credit would be to do things for a person you didn't love.

"To the first creature I meet to-day, who needs help, I'll give it," she said to herself. "I'll do something big ... like sacrificing on an altar."

She went out in Roger's latest present, a limousine car, so silent and so swift that it travelled like a cloud-shadow. Outside the car was dark blue; inside, the pale azure of a robin's egg. Beverley told the chauffeur to drive to Moreton and Payntor's, avoiding traffic because she was in a hurry. To do this, he approached the shop by passing through a side street in which was the entrance for employees, as well as that leading to minor departments, and so connecting with the main shop. It was comparatively a quiet street, but to-day there was a crowd. Something had happened, and only a moment ago, for a policeman was just coming up. The chauffeur would have hurried by to spare Mrs. Sands what might be an unpleasant sight, but on one of her impulses she stopped him. The car windows were open. Beverley heard the words "Poor child" and "Ambulance." She opened the door and jumped out. Because she was beautiful and beautifully dressed, and had a fine car, people made way for her.

On the pavement a girl was lying. There was some blood, and that would have made Beverley sick, if the face streaked red hadn't struck her as the most tragic, the most pathetic face she had ever seen. It was so ghastly white, so thin, and yet so young!

"What is it? What's happened?" she inquired of the innermost group.

"Chucked herself out of a fourth story window," a fat woman answered. "Somebody was beastly to her, I guess."

"Is she dead?" Beverley asked.

"Not yet ... though she must be a bag o' broken bones. She'll die on the way to hospital, likely, in the ambulance, with nobody to care."

At that instant, as if she heard the terrible words, the girl's eyes opened. It seemed to Beverley that they looked straight at her.

Suddenly she remembered her own resolve. It had been almost a vow: "To the first creature I meet to-day who needs help I'll give it."

Here was the creature. If ever there were an appeal in human eyes, it was in these. Perhaps it was an unconscious appeal. Perhaps the brain had been stunned asleep, but the deep-down soul was awake. It was calling to Beverley's soul, and the call had to be answered, or the vow would be broken. Roger Sands' wife dared not break such a vow lest she should be punished and lose her magical happiness.

She hated the sight of blood. She wanted to think that, if the girl were dying, she could do no good. Yet, while reason argued, instinct had already decided that this was the claimant of the vow. Beverley knelt down beside the curiously flat-looking body which lay on the pavement. Her dress dipped into a widening pool of blood, but she did not sicken as she had thought she would. And to her own surprise she found her hand stroking back a lock of dark red hair from the upturned face. Poor, thin, child's face!

"Don't be afraid, you're going to be loved and cared for," she promised.

By this time a doctor had arrived. He, too, knelt by the sufferer. He spoke to Beverley, thinking she had some acquaintance with the injured girl. The police had cleared away the sensation seekers, but the lovely lady of the blue automobile was left in peace. She seemed to be helping the doctor.

"Keep off, please, keep off," the policemen repeated. "The ambulance'll be round any instant."

But the ambulance did not take its cue. This was strange, for the service was splendidly prompt. A man ran up bringing news that there'd been a collision with a trolley. No one was hurt, but it meant a delay before another ambulance could be called and respond.

"Can't we take her away in my car?" asked Beverley. "Oh, why shouldn't I have her at my house? She's only a child, so thin and frail! Loving care might save her. I'd have a trained nurse in. I'm Mrs. Roger Sands. You may know my husband's name."

The name of Roger Sands was impressive. So was Beverley, and so was the car. The ambulance wasn't at hand, and time pressed. It seemed as if the offer might be accepted. The doctor was the physician engaged to attend the employees of

Moreton and Payntor, and had authority in the neighbourhood. To test Mrs. Roger Sands' character he abruptly ordered her into the surgical department —"ground floor, close by the side street entrance"—to "fetch out a stretcher and be quick." Beverley responded without hesitation, and in two minutes a startled boy appeared with a canvas thing like a cot.

The doctor and one of the policemen got the childish body on to this while Beverley darted to her waiting chauffeur. He—Robbins, an elderly Englishman —was furious, but short of giving notice then and there, could do nothing save obey. The folding chairs were pulled out: on one was piled the car's best ornament, a large chinchilla rug, and some blue silk cushions. These gave support for the foot of the stretcher, its head resting on the seat; and the other folding chair was taken by the doctor who, sitting there, could hold his patient safely in place. Mrs. Roger Sands scrambled up beside her chauffeur, and did not even notice that the man's face was a thundercloud.

Robbins could have cried. His last situation in England had been with a duke. He would still have occupied it, had he not long passed the "smart" age. Roger Sands had thought him an excellent guardian for Beverley. Robbins didn't approve of America, but he had approved of his mistress. There had seemed to him something queenly about her which "reminded him of home," but to-day he was ashamed of her: to drive through the streets of New York sitting on the front seat beside him, as if she were a lady's maid! Worse than all, her dress, her gloves, were stained with blood. As for the inside of the new car, it would be ruined. The man felt responsible, and believed that his master would consider him so. Sitting beside Mrs. Sands, with the look of an inferior Roman statue on his square face, the chauffeur resolved to see Mr. Sands before the tale of this morning's work could be told by Sands' American chauffeur, who drove him to and from the office. The Englishman decided to bribe the American to "lend his job" that afternoon. They could arrange an excuse. Harter had a cold. But, as it happened, Roger Sands read of the affair in a second edition of an evening paper while he waited for his car.

To see Beverley's name in big letters gave him a shock. He became conscious that somewhere within him had always been a horror of finding his wife's name in a newspaper, heading "scarelines." His first feeling as he read on was of relief. Why, this was nothing!

Some reporter had worked up the incident into a romance, and his editor, appreciating Roger Sands' importance, had given it nearly a whole column. On

the surface it was a tribute to Mrs. Sands' goodness of heart; but as Roger's rush of thankfulness passed, he began to see an unpleasant side of the business.

The reporter had interviewed various persons in the firm of Moreton and Payntor. He had learned that the girl befriended by Mrs. Roger Sands was employed in the restaurant for women "assistants." By certain of these, she had been suspected of small thefts. They had watched her, and it was in the midst of a "scene" following an accusation, that the waitress had suddenly flung herself out of a fourth story window. She was an Irish girl not long in New York. Her name was Clo Riley, and she had been in the employ of Moreton and Payntor for nearly seven months. She had made no friends, and was considered "Mysterious."

At the Park Avenue apartment of Mr. and Mrs. Roger Sands an interview had been refused; but the reporter had learned from a servant that, if the invalid were "a dear relative" of Mrs. Sands, she could not be more lovingly cared for. The largest and handsomest spare room had been hastily prepared, a trained nurse engaged, and a famous surgeon had been called in consultation with the doctor who had undertaken the case. Following these details came a description of Mrs. Roger Sands, gleaned from an "eye witness" of the "sensational scene" enacted in the street.

The story developed strangely to Roger. He saw something behind it. He knew things about Beverley which, he trusted, few others knew, and saw the affair in another light.

Roger's marriage experiment was a success. He was glad that he had taken the girl "as she stood." To have what she had called a "figure cut off its background out of an unseen picture," was better than to have lost forever a figure of such beauty. He believed that Beverley was as good as she was sweet, but she had been right in her prophecy; it was hideous, sometimes, to see her outlined against darkness.

The incident had happened close to Moreton and Payntor's department store. Beverley had been in the habit of going there lately. She might have had a reason for choosing that shop. Indeed, it struck Roger as incredible that even her impulsiveness could lead her so far, for a stranger's sake. Besides, why hadn't she telephoned? It looked as if she were determined to carry out her scheme before he could oppose it.

In this mood he went to his automobile. He was surprised to see Robbins, but not

sorry, because Robbins had been mixed up in the morning's affair.

"What's this I've been reading in the *Evening Star*?" he broke in.

Here was luck for Robbins! He began to excuse himself for the disgrace which had fallen upon the new car. "It was the mistress's order, sir, and I had no choice; but I can't help thinking if she'd known what a mess the blood would make, she'd 'ave let me call a taxi."

"Another lining is easily put in," said Roger, coolly; but he was angry for the first time with Beverley. Of all women, she was the one who ought to think twice before doing a thing to get herself talked about; but she never thought twice. As he drove homeward, doubts of her crowded into his mind.

At home, Beverley was in the room which had been turned into a hospital ward. The nurse had called her, to announce that the "patient" had returned to consciousness and had begun asking questions.

"I saw it would worry her to be put off," went on Sister Lake, "so I told her a few things. She remembered throwing herself out of the window, and the fall, and then waking up, lying in the street. She said she'd dreamed of an angel-girl bending over her. When she heard what you'd done, she insisted on speaking to you."

"I'll go at once!" Beverley exclaimed.

"Just for a few minutes," the nurse hinted.

Beverley let herself be led in. The room looked strange to her. The servants, directed by the doctor, and later by the trained nurse, had swiftly, noiselessly made the changes before the girl came back to herself. The curtains had been taken down, and rugs cleared away from the parquet floor. Most of the furniture had disappeared, and on a glass table were a number of bottles. The bed faced the door, and as Mrs. Sands softly entered a pair of eyes looked at her. Beverley's heart jumped as her eyes met them. She had not known how immense and dark they were, or that they were beautiful.

The nurse drew Mrs. Sands near to the bed, and issued her orders before the girl could open her lips.

"Neither of you must talk much," she commanded. "Mrs. Sands has come to let you see that she exists, and you can thank her if you like, but she mustn't stay

many minutes."

"Sister Lake is right," said Beverley. "You mustn't excite yourself. You're going to get well; and this is your home."

"I'm not excited," the girl answered, in a low, monotonous voice, hardly above a whisper. "But I had to see you, and tell you this one thing. I didn't want to live, because ... I was miserable, and everyone hated me; still, it seemed awful to die. You saved me. I wish to live now, if only to show you what gratitude can be. I expect you're awfully rich. I'm poorer than any church mouse. It doesn't look as if I could do anything for one like you. But who knows? There was a mouse once helped a lion. It gnawed a hole in a net. I feel as if the time must come when I can do as much, because I want to so dreadfully. That's all!"

# IV

## THE MURMUR OF THE STORM

It seemed that everything were to go wrong with Roger Sands that day. He had felt for the last few months that a cloud had risen between him and John Heron, whose cause he had won in California. If ever a business man owed a debt of gratitude to the brains of another, John Heron owed such a debt to Roger Sands, who had risked not only his reputation, but even his life against the powerful enemies of the alleged "California Oil Trust King." Heron had appeared fully to appreciate this; and before Roger left for New York had been almost oppressively cordial, begging in vain that Roger would visit him and his wife, a famous beauty with Spanish blood in her veins. He had written once, immediately after Sands' departure, and had telegraphed congratulations on reading the news of Roger's marriage. But the friendly reply had remained unacknowledged. The wedding present of a gold tea service had been accompanied by no letter, only a card with the names of "Mr. and Mrs. John Heron." With Sands' thanks the correspondence ended.... This had vexed Roger, who liked Heron and was not used to being slighted. The only thing he could think of was Beverley's failure to enclose a note to Mrs. Heron in his letter of thanks. She had argued that the present was for him, really, and that if she wrote Mrs. Heron it would look "pushing."

Roger let the matter slide, and had written in his wife's name and his own. At last he read in some newspaper that "Mr. and Mrs. John Heron intended shortly to start for the east, where they would spend the summer." Without waiting to consult Beverley he wrote, saying he had read the news, and he and his wife hoped for a visit in their Newport house as soon as it was ready. He had written, not from the office, but from home, with the Park Avenue address on the paper. To-day, as he entered his study, his eye lit on an envelope with John Heron's writing upon it.

The letter lay on the top of others on his desk, and instead of going to find Beverley at once, as was his lover's custom, he sat down to read his correspondence.

The first letter he opened was Heron's, which consisted of a few lines on one

page. Roger's eyes took in the whole at a glance.

DEAR MR. SANDS:

My wife and I are obliged to you for your kind invitation, but owing to the fact that we have already made a great number of engagements I fear we shall be unable to give ourselves the pleasure of accepting.

Yours truly,

JOHN HERON.

The blood rushed to Roger's forehead. He realized that this was a deliberate insult.

The last letter had begun "Dear Sands," and had been signed "Yours gratefully ever." Roger was even more furious than mystified. "Next time he wants me to pull him out of a death trap, he can whistle for his pains!"

At that instant Beverley tapped at the door, and half opened it to peep in.

This irritated Roger. He had told her from the first that she need not knock at his study door.

"How often have I begged you not to knock?" he broke out at her. "Come in if you want to."

It was the first time he had ever spoken crossly. Beverley started, and the look on her face, instead of overwhelming Roger with remorse, hardened him.

Beverley's colour had been bright, but she turned pale as Roger flung at her his scolding words. Seeing the letter in her husband's hand the blood streamed back to her cheeks. If she could possibly have known and recognized Heron's writing, it might have seemed that the sight of it had struck her with fear. But no such far-fetched thought occurred to her husband.

"I—I'm sorry!" she said hastily. "I heard your voice—I supposed someone was with you——"

Roger forgot that he had spoken aloud. In silence he let the girl cross the floor and sit down in the easy chair she called "hers." She dropped into it as if her knees had given way, and looked at Roger. When he did not speak, she could bear the suspense no longer.

"You—you're reading a letter—I interrupted you?"

"The letter's of no importance," said Roger, throwing it upon the desk. "It's only from John Heron to tell me that he and his wife won't be able to come and see us at Newport. One would suppose by his tone that he was offended. Probably Mrs. Heron expected you to gush over the wedding present, and has put him up to snubbing me because you didn't."

"You asked the Herons to visit us? I—didn't know——"

"I did ask them," Roger cut her short. "I heard they were coming East."

"Oh, Roger, I couldn't have met them! If they'd accepted I should have had to be ill, or—or go away!" Beverley exclaimed on one of her impulses, which instantly she appeared to regret. "I'm glad you don't like Mr. Heron's letter, because—you'll never ask them again! I haven't done anything to annoy you, have I?"

"You know best whether you have or not."

"What do you mean?"

"Is it necessary to ask? I came home intending not to question you. But I must make one comment: you're surprised that I invite a friend to visit us without consulting you. That seems inconsistent with what you've done. I've read the evening paper, and——"

"Oh, Roger! It's in the paper ... about that poor child and me?"

"Naturally! You and I aren't nonentities."

"You don't think I did wrong?"

"Wrong's a big word. You've done something foolish, and inconsiderate to me."

"What harm can the child do to you?"

"That depends upon what sort of 'child' she is! Perhaps you can give me a better account of her than the *Evening Star* gives!"

"I can't give you any," said Beverley, in a trembling voice, "except that she was the most pitiful thing I ever saw ... so young and desperate, lying in pools of blood."

"Which pools of blood you transferred to your new motor car, my present, that I thought you valued."

"Roger! What did the motor matter, compared with saving a life?"

"Saving a life wasn't in question. An ambulance would have been on the spot in a minute to take the girl to a hospital."

"She wouldn't have had love in a hospital. I felt it was for lack of love she'd tried to kill herself...."

"A girl who steals her companions' money can't expect to have their love...."

"Oh! So that's what the newspaper says? I don't believe she stole. Wait till you see the poor little thing, Roger."

"I don't want to see her. Now she's here, she'll have to stay till she dies, or can be safely moved. I've no wish to be cruel. But when she can go, I want her to do so. I don't mind giving...."

"You do mind giving faith and sympathy!" Beverley burst out. "Why should you take me on faith, and refuse it to another? You knew nothing about me ... I know nothing about this child...."

"Ah, you're sure you know nothing about her!" His tone was bitter.

"What could I know?" she echoed. "I brought her straight home, and she hasn't been able to talk ... except a few words."

"It occurred to me as rather odd you should do so much for a complete stranger."

"Oh, I see! You think I knew her ... before?"

"I thought it possible. Her name put the idea into my head. I heard you say it once ... in your ... sleep ... Riley ... or something like that."

For the third time Beverley blushed, one of her fatal, agonized blushes. The rush of blood forced tears to her eyes; and a certain strained look in them, a quivering of the lips, brought back to Roger's mind a picture of her in the train. That was the first time he had seen her blush. She had said—he remembered well—"You are the only man I'm interested in," and had blushed furiously. He had been sure then that she was no adventuress. She had looked like a frightened child, and she looked like one now. With that picture of the girl in the train came back another

recollection. She had asked if any man had inquired for her, or if any "noticeable" person had sought his acquaintance. He had replied that he'd not spoken with a soul except a man he knew slightly, a Congressman from California named O'Reilly. He supposed that O'Reilly didn't interest her? Upon this, with a desperate blush, she had made her startlingly frank reply.

As this came back, Roger's heart was no longer soft. What a fool he had been, that day in the train, not to connect the girl's change of colour with his mention of O'Reilly! She might have blurted out her compliment to excuse the blush, instead of the blush having followed the compliment. Good heavens! could Justin O'Reilly have been the man from whom she wished to hide?

"Perhaps the name you spoke in your sleep was O'Reilly!" he flung at his wife.

Beverley gathered herself together.

"So all this time," she said, "you have been suspicious of me! And I was so happy. I thought you were happy, too, but it's just as I was afraid it would be, if I married you. You can't endure the strain!"

"I have endured the strain," Roger defended himself; "because I loved you as few men have ever loved, but the question is, have you deserved it all?"

"This is the moment I felt must come!" she said. "If I had only myself to think of, don't you know I'd have told you everything? I warned you how it would be ... how I should have to keep the secret not for a little while, but for always! If you don't believe, if you think I lied when I said no man had ever been anything to me ... if you think I lie now, when I say I never saw or heard of this girl till I found her in the street.... I can go out of your life.... I can go to-day!"

As she spoke slowly, sentence by sentence, with a sobbing breath between, Beverley looked straight into her husband's eyes. Hers did not falter though they swam in tears. With her last words, she rose and stood facing him as he sat at his desk.

Roger gave her back gaze for gaze, as if he would read her secret written in cypher on her soul. He saw that she meant what she said. A word from him, and their experiment was at an end. She would go. It seemed to him that never had her beauty been so gentle, so womanly.

"You shan't go!" he cried, springing to his feet. "I can't give you up!"

But she held him off.

"No!" she panted. "I won't stay if you want me only in that way—because you have a kind of love for me, whether you believe in me or not. I love you too much to be shamed by you! Either you trust me, or you don't. Say which it is, and I'll stay, or go."

"I've got to trust you! I do!" The words seemed to burst from him. "You know I love you more than all the world. It would kill me to lose you."

"I'd rather die from the shock of losing you, Roger, than from such a hateful pain, going on and on——"

"It shan't go on," he said. "I've been happy, too. I'm a changed man since the hour I saw you and loved you. It's only to-day I've been wretched. Forgive me, Bev—and God forgive you if——"

"There's an 'if' for you?"

"No—no, there's no 'if' any more. You're to forgive me——that's all!"

"Oh, I do! The hard thing would be not to forgive. But—can we go on being happy again, just as if nothing had happened?"

"Of course we can, silly child. Nothing has happened." Roger had her in his arms now. He kissed her over and over again, till she gasped for breath. "This has only cleared the air. As for that beastly child, I don't care if she's a murderess. Keep her forever, if you choose. Train her as your maid——"

"But she's not 'beastly!' And she's not the kind to have for a maid. I think she's a lady. She seems——"

"Well, do whatever you like with her. Can I go further, to show you I want to atone?"

"No, you can't, Roger——" Beverley nestled her face into his neck. "I adore you!"

She closed her eyes, but opening them she happened, looking over Roger's shoulder, to see John Heron's letter on her husband's desk. A faint shiver ran through her body, and Roger felt it.

"What's the matter, my darling?" he asked.

"Nothing!" she answered. "A mouse ran over my grave."

# V

## ON THE WAY TO THE CAR

Beverley found that she could "be happy again, as if nothing had happened" between her and Roger. For one thing, it was wonderful to feel that she had the power to "save" a fellow-being, and wonderful to be worshipped as Clo worshipped her. Of course, Roger "worshipped" her, too, but it was Beverley who looked up to him. Clo looked up to her. When Beverley went into the room presided over by Sister Lake, the child's great black eyes dwelt upon her as the eyes of a devotee upon the form of a goddess "come alive." Roger Sands' wife felt simply that she was repaying God for saving her, by what she was able to do for this Irish girl.

As soon as Clo was allowed to talk she insisted upon telling Beverley about herself. There was, apparently, no romance or mystery in the story of her eighteen years of life. Her mother had died when she was less than three, but Clo could "remember her perfectly." It wasn't only the photograph she had (a badly taken one of a young woman with a baby in her arms), but she could see her mother's colouring. Oh, such lovely colouring! Not dark red hair, like her own, but gold, and eyes more brown than gray. And mother had been only twenty-four when she died. Clo had to admit that most of what she knew of mother was from the Sisters who looked after the orphans. Yes, it was in an orphan asylum that the child had been brought up. About father she knew nothing, except that mother had "lost" him before her baby was born, and that he "came from America." Evidently his name had been Riley, because mother was Mrs. Riley, and Clo was Clodagh because "that was a name in mother's family."

The Sisters had been particularly kind. Mother had given Clo into their care, because she lodged, and had fallen ill, in the street of the orphan asylum. There had been a little money, which was placed in a bank for the child. The Sisters had known that mother was a lady; but the orphan girls, when they grew up, were supposed to be put into service. Neither Clo nor the Sisters had wanted her to be a servant, and when she was sixteen a situation was found for her as "companion" to an old lady. Clo "stuck it out" for nearly two years. Then she ran away and sailed for the United States, her unknown father's land, with the sixty

pounds which was her fortune. This money was all spent, and she was nearly starving when she snatched at what she could get with Moreton and Payntor.

"But I just couldn't eat and dress on my wages," Clo explained, in her soft, rich voice, rather deep for so young and small a girl, and made creamy by a touch of Irish brogue. "One has to do both in New York. I was so hungry all the time, if the girls left a crust on their plates I used to hide it. I expect the way I'd look to see if there'd be anything left gave them the idea I was a sly piece. They thought I put on airs, too. Me! P'raps it was my not knowing their kind of slang. And it's true I did steal once, or almost the same thing as steal. There was a dollar bill on the floor under a table one afternoon. 'Stead of trying to find who was the owner, I slipped it inside my dress. I must have been nearly off my head, or I'd never have done it, darling Mrs. Sands! When the time came to go home to my room that night, I didn't go. I went to a restaurant, and I ate. I ate a whole dollar's worth of dinner, just so I couldn't give any money back if I changed my mind next day. Well, next day was the day you know of. And what with knowing I was a thief, and the girls knowing it, too—though there was no proof—I thought the best thing for a lost child was to die!"

Beverley had by this time "made everything right" for Clo at Moreton and Payntor's. Indeed, Mrs. Roger Sands having taken her up, she had become quite a classic figure of romance among her late enemies. When Beverley told the girl that when she got well she wouldn't have to go, but could stop and be "a sort of secretary," Clo Riley almost had a relapse from the shock of joy.

By the end of May Clo's broken ribs had mended. The first day when she was up and dressed, able to go downstairs, and out for a spin in the renovated blue car, she was a very different looking girl from the battered wisp of humanity whose blood had stained the "robin's-egg" cloth and silk.

It was Sunday, and Clo was burning with excitement. She was to meet her Angel's husband for the first time. She had pictured him a dragon. The Angel loved him, but the Angel was such a saint, and would love any old husband. Clo imagined that Beverley had been poor (she must have known poverty to be so sympathetic!) and that she'd married an elderly man because—well, not entirely because he was rich (that wouldn't be like an Angel) but because she needed protection. Clo expected to see a grumpy graybeard.

Roger expected to see a washed-out invalid of indefinite type, a young woman of the shabbiest shop-girl order.

What Clodagh saw, when she followed Mrs. Sands into the study, was a strong, dark man, not old at all, apparently, and almost interesting enough in looks to be worthy of the Angel. Still, she was not sure she was going to like him.

What Roger saw was a small, slender girl, too childish, too impish, to think of as a "young woman." She had a little oval face with a pointed chin. It was pale, but not washed-out, and her lips were red. An obstinate, impudent mouth, Roger thought. As for her eyes—he had never seen such great eyes in a human face. They were like holes in a blanket, so big, so black, as they stared up at him. She had curly auburn hair, that looked even redder than it was, in contrast with her eyes. But though the face was impish, not pretty precisely, with its high cheek bones and impertinent chin, he had to admit that it was noticeable, and, in some odd way, attractive. The girl was charmingly dressed. He might have known that Bev would see to that. Clo was a surprise to him, as he was to her. Each saw that the other was a distinct and interesting personality; and Roger realized that Beverley was right; the girl had the air of being a lady. There was something else about her, too, which piqued him. He could not make out what it was. Did she look like someone he knew?

He was polite, as he had promised to be, and called Clo "Miss Riley." When Beverley said that they were going out for the invalid's first drive, Roger replied that he was glad; but Clo, catching his eye, fancied she saw a sarcastic gleam.

"He's thinking of the time I came here in that same car," she told herself. "I know I must have spoilt it—got it all messed up with blood. Probably he had to give a lot for doing it over. And my goodness, the dollars of his that Angel has been pouring out for me every day since! No wonder he looks sick! But some day I shall pay. I don't know how, only I shall—I shall!"

Beverley and Clo went down in the gorgeously decorated elevator.

"If Angel lived in a garret, it would be a palace to me," she reflected.

A hall porter opened the door of carved bronze over glass. Without seeming to look, he took in every detail of the slim figure in white cloth; the small white hat tilted over the dark red hair, the tiny white shoes, the dainty ankles in silk stockings. Clo could have laughed aloud. Of course, the giant in livery knew the whole story. He was contrasting the way she came out with the way she had come in.

Drawn up at the pavement was the glittering blue automobile, with the

statuesque Robbins at the wheel. Clo remembered both, with a queer, sick pang. She had not been wholly unconscious when the stretcher was pushed into the car. "What I owe this darling woman!" was the thought she breathed like a prayer.

As the two crossed the pavement—tall, beautiful Beverley and quaint little Clo—a man who must have been loitering close by started toward them with a limping step, and took off his hat.

"Is this Mrs. Roger Sands?" he asked.

Beverley stopped short, within a yard of her car. For such a graceful, softly moving person, her movement seemed jerky. Clo glanced from the man to Mrs. Sands in surprise. One would say the Angel looked frightened, only that would be absurd! Besides, the man wasn't a creature worth being afraid of. He was short, and very thin, as if he had been ill. He hadn't a nice face. Sallow and sickly it was, like a prison bird, with hollows under the red-rimmed eyes. He was badly lame, too, if he wasn't pretending; and altogether, in spite of her newly mended ribs, Clo felt that she herself would be equal to knocking him down.

"Yes, I am Mrs. Sands," Beverley answered, as if against her will. "I don't—but perhaps someone has sent you with a message?"

"In a way, yes, that's it," said the man. "I had a message for you. I'm the man sent to meet you in Chicago, September 21st of last year."

# VI

## THE PARCEL WITH THE GOLD SEALS

There was a second of suspense for Clo, and then Beverley spoke quietly:

"Oh, I see! That's very interesting," she said. "I hope—the news is good?"

"It's a long message," the man answered. "I was told to let you have it in person. I thought you'd be goin' out sooner or later. If your husban' 'ad bin along, I'd have left a line, but——"

"Never mind what you would have done, please," Beverley cut him short. "The best thing I can think of now, is this" (she hurried on in a low tone, and Clo who had stepped aside, nearer to the car, did not catch the words), "Take a taxi, and follow my automobile. We're going into the Park. When you see us stop, you must stop too, at a distance.

"I shall get out and let the motor, with my friend in it, go on without me for a while. Then we can talk. Do you understand?"

"I'll be there," said the man.

He touched his hat and moved away, as if his errand were done.

"Drive slowly through the Park," Beverley instructed Robbins, and gently made Clo get into the car before her. "I'm so sorry to have kept you standing, dear," she said. "I hope you don't feel weak or 'tottery'?"

Clo did feel very weak, not from fatigue, but from excitement. She replied that she felt "grand." And Mrs. Sands forgot to say that she was glad.

The girl glanced at the older woman, and saw that she was staring straight ahead, with a withdrawn look in her eyes, which told that she saw nothing. Clo's heart beat fast. This drive was to have been a glorious experience. She had seen Central Park more than once, and had walked there, miserable in her loneliness. Now, though she looked out of the window, it was to let Beverley feel that she was not being stared at. The girl saw only a blur of colour, as if a kaleidoscope turned before her eyes.

At last Beverley spoke.

"Dear child," she said, "I'm sure you understand that the man who was waiting for me brought a message I'm anxious to hear. And—I'm sure of another thing—that I can trust you!"

"I'd die any minute for you, sure I would!" she cried.

"I believe you would! But I don't want you to die. All I want is for you to listen while I explain——"

"As if you needed to explain to me!" the girl broke out.

"I don't need to, perhaps, yet I wish to say just this: I love Roger dearly. I've told you so often enough! I'd give anything on earth not to have a secret from him. But to save a life—not my own—there is a secret I must keep. This man and his message are part of it. Now, that's all I'm going to explain, except that—that nothing must be said."

"I'd bite my tongue out sooner!" Clo protested.

"Thank you, dear! Now we've had this talk, it's a comfort, not a worry, having you with me. You won't mind if I send you on while I get down and walk in the Park?"

"I'd love it!" said Clo.

At once Beverley took the speaking tube and ordered the chauffeur to stop. He drew up at the side of the road. They were in the midst of the Park now, an exquisite green and gold world of peace and beauty.

"I feel like taking a little exercise," Beverley said to Robbins, as she stepped out of the car. "Miss Riley isn't strong enough to walk. Go as far along Riverside Drive as Grant's Tomb, and then come back, but slowly, so she can see everything. You'll find me waiting here."

It seemed that Robbins carried out his instructions too laboriously. Clo didn't like the ferret-man, and she didn't believe that Beverley liked meeting him.

When at last Robbins brought the car back to the rendezvous there was the tall graceful figure in gray, standing alone.

"Oh, have we kept you?" the girl cried, throwing open the door before the

automobile stopped.

Beverley did not answer, or seem to hear. She did not even look at Clo.

"Home!" she said to Robbins. "As fast as you can!"

Clo was shocked into silence, and hardly breathed when Beverley had sunk on to the seat, covering her face with her hands. The car had nearly reached the Sands' corner of Park Avenue before the elder girl spoke. Then she said abruptly, as if waking from a dream:

"Forgive me! I couldn't talk! I'm in dreadful trouble! I must ask you to help me. Are you strong enough to take a longer drive, and to walk a few steps alone?"

"Rather!" said Clo.

"Well, when we stop in front of our house, sit still in the car. I don't want Sister Lake or Roger to know we're back. I'll run in, get a parcel which must be taken to a certain place, and give it to you. Then Robbins will drive (I'll tell him) to a hotel on Broadway, called the Westmorland. I never heard of it before, but it seems that it's near 33d Street, and quiet and respectable. Go into the restaurant and order tea. While you're there, that man you saw will come into the room, and you'll hand him the packet. That's all."

"It sounds too easy," Clo said.

"I hope it will be easy. I'll bring you a latch-key when I come down with the parcel. Let yourself in when you get home, and go straight to your room. I don't want you to fib, but try to make it seem to Sister as if we'd just come back. She'll think it strange if she knows I've sent you out on an errand by yourself."

"She shan't know," the girl promised.

"You *are* a comfort! You see, I told Roger I'd be at home by four, and I couldn't be, till long after if I took the parcel myself. I shall only just be in time as it is. Here we are at the door! Now I'll rush. In five minutes I hope to be with you again. Oh, if only Sister Lake isn't at the window!"

The five minutes passed, and Beverley didn't return. Clo watched the silver-gilt clock under the vase of violets. Ten minutes; fifteen minutes; no Mrs. Sands! The girl was wondering whether she ought to wait indefinitely, or seek her friend to see what had happened when Beverley appeared. She was breathless with

haste.

"Here, take this, and do just as I told you to do," she said, thrusting into Clo's hands a bag, not a parcel. "Inside you'll find what I spoke of, and money to pay for your tea. I had to hide the parcel. I can't stop to explain more now." She turned to the chauffeur, and hastily ordered him to drive to the Westmorland Hotel. Miss Riley had to meet a friend there; Robbins must wait till she was ready to come home.

Only as the car slowed down in front of the third-rate hotel did Clo touch the hasp of the gray suede bag. It was not locked, and save for a crumpled dollar bill, its sole contents was a large, unaddressed envelope fastened with three gold seals. On each of these seals was the same elaborate monogram, which Clo did not try to make out; but it was not composed of Beverley Sands' initials. Evidently the parcel had been crammed into the first handy receptacle, for it was all but too big to go in, and Clo found it difficult to extract without damaging the seals. Leaving the bag on the seat, she hid the envelope under the smart, white cloth cape which went with her new frock.

The restaurant of the hotel opened off the hall. At that hour, a little after four o'clock, there was no one in the room but a waiter. Afternoon tea was evidently not a daily custom of the Westmorland's guests, but when it was brought at length, the ferret-man had not yet arrived.

"Oh, dear, what shall I do if he doesn't come?" Clodagh asked herself, thinking fearfully about the chauffeur—and about Sister Lake.

Just then the face of the ferret man appeared at the door. He glanced about, fixed the girl with his red-rimmed eyes, slouched into the room, and limped briskly to the table.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, with a familiar grin, and pulled out a chair to sit opposite Clo. He kept on his hat. His breath reeked spirits, and the girl was disgusted, but she was the faithful servant of Mrs. Sands, and the waiter was staring.

"Here's the parcel Mrs. Sands sent. She particularly wanted me to get back as soon as possible."

The long envelope, with the gold seals uppermost, was lying on the table. Clo removed a napkin she had laid over it, and pushed the parcel across the table. As she did this she rose.

"Looks right enough!" remarked the ferret man, sitting still. "This is what she told me to expect: long white envelope, three gold seals——" He picked the parcel up, holding it to his sharp nose and near-sighted eyes. "Yeh, munergram, or what yuh call it, right, too."

"Then that's all," said Clo, Beverley's dollar bill in her hand. "I'll call the waiter ——"

"Don't be too previous, cutie, *if* you please!" and a not immaculate hand helped itself to a fold of her dress. "Yuh an' me ain't workin' this show on our own. You're for Mrs. Sands, I'm fur—well, I'm fur someone I guess is even more particular than her. It's as much as my job's worth to let yuh make your get-away till I've had a squint inside this yere envelup."

"Mrs. Sands didn't tell me there was anything to wait for after I'd put it in your hands," Clo objected. "I don't see——"

"It's me that's got to see. Now yuh keep yer hair on, gurlie, while I lamp this thing. No good tryin' the sneak game, because I'd be on to yuh like a thousand o' brick before yuh'd took a step——"

"I've no intention of running away," Clo assured him, with a dignity copied from her idol. "Mrs. Sands has nothing to hide."

The man chuckled, as with a knife taken from the table he opened the envelope without breaking the seals. He did this slowly. Clo sat down again.

The ugly hands drew out from the envelope another smaller envelope. There were no seals on it, but the flap was stuck with gum. The man swore under his breath as he used the knife again. Clo was deeply interested. Her idea was that the fellow would pull out a quantity of greenbacks; but in an instant she saw that she had guessed wrong. There were many sheets of paper folded together, at least a dozen, and this seemed to astound the man. With a jerk he opened out the sheaf of papers, and having stared an instant, slammed them on to the table. "Curse her, she thought she'd do us, did she?" The words tumbled out between his brown, broken teeth, as he dashed his fist on to the papers. "So this is why she sent you—you catspaw!"

Clo was far from being a coward. Her hot, defiant temper rose at the least alarm, but she was so amazed at the result of her errand that she was struck dumb. Mechanically her eyes had turned to the papers. She saw that the upper sheets

consisted of blank stationery taken from a train, the Santa Fé Limited.

"If you're trying to scare me, you can't," she said. "You're acting like a fool. If something's gone wrong in your business, it isn't my fault, and I'm sure it isn't Mrs. Sands. If there's a trick, she's tricked, too. Try to have common sense."

The girl's fearless gaze and quickly spoken words calmed the man.

"It's darned rot to say my lady who stayed at home ain't in the trick. Why, dumbhead, this paper shows! She was on board the Limited. Gee! Don't I have cause to know that? It's easy as slidin' off a log to see what she done. She helped herself to what was in this yere envelope, an' filled it with train stationery. Then she sealed it up with the same kind o' seals. Stole the stamp and wax on purpose. Thought she could get away with it. I take off my hat to her."

"I know nothing except that I agreed to bring the parcel," said Clo.

"You go back to her ladyship as fast as you can scamper, and tell her I wasn't soft enough to bow myself off the stage without peepin' at what Santa Claus had put in my stockin'. Tell her 'twould only o' bin a matter o' time if I hadn't peeped. As it is, it's a matter o' less time. Tell her a life will pay for this, and she jolly well knows whose!"

The man had ceased to bluster, and now that he had got himself in hand again his fierce eyes and his low, hissing voice thrilled the girl as his threats had not thrilled her. This time he allowed her to rise, which she did, tottering slightly. She had forgotten about paying for her tea, but the dollar bill lay in a crumpled wad on the table. The man placed one of his oddly repulsive hands over it.

"I'll see to the waiter," he said. "I'm stayin' in this hotel. You cut along and tell your lady friend she's got till ten o'clock to-night to explain herself, not a minute more. Good day to you, Miss Baby Doll!"

Without answering, Clo walked out of the room, ashamed that her knees were weak, and hoping that she could get safely to the car without making a fool of herself. Physically, it was a great relief to lie back against the soft cushions of robin's egg blue, and shut her eyes. What would Angel do when she heard how dreadfully the errand had failed?

Clo had forgotten the difficulty of making Sister Lake believe, without a fib, that she and Mrs. Sands had only just come in from their drive together. But she remembered as she went up in the elevator. It was very late now—long after

five. Sister was sure to be cross; but if she were cross only with Clo, and not Mrs. Sands, that wouldn't matter.

Few things work out according to expectations. Sister Lake had been at the window, it seemed, when the car brought back Mrs. Sands and Clo before four o'clock, and had been alarmed when the former descended to hurry alone into the house.

"I was afraid you'd fainted," she said when Clo arrived at last. "I flew out of this room to go down in the elevator, and bumped into Mr. Sands in the hall, and while I was apologizing and making him understand she appeared on the scene."

"My goodness, the fat *is* in the fire!" Clo thought desperately. Aloud she said: "Well?"

"She said you wanted to go to tea with someone, and she was hurrying to her room to get money for you, so that you could stand treat. I objected, as I had a right to do," went on Sister Lake. "You're still my patient, if my time is up to-morrow. And if you have a relapse I shall be in a nice fix, as I'm due at Mrs. Jardine's Tuesday morning! Mrs. Sands really acted very queer, she was so determined you should go. Even when her husband backed me up, she was as obstinate as—as—if she wasn't such a sweet woman, I should say a pig!"

"It was my fault," pleaded Clo. "I'm not tired a bit." Yet as she argued, a voice was saying inside her head: "No wonder the poor darling was a long time coming down with the parcel!"

But this, though exciting enough, was as naught beside the great question: "What would Beverley say, what would she feel, when Clo had to confess all that had happened at the Hotel Westmorland?"

# VII

## THE QUEEN'S PEARLS

Roger also had a secret that Sunday. He waited for Beverley and Clo to be gone (reminding his wife that she had promised to be back by four) and then called up the Belmont Hotel by telephone.

"Give me Count Lovoresco's room," he said, and presently a foreign conception of the word "Hello!" rumbled through the receiver.

"Hello, Count," Roger replied, recognizing the voice. "My wife's safely off. I'll send my own car round at once. Now you've got the letter of confirmation we can settle our business. What? You're ready? Thank you. My man'll be at the hotel as soon as you can get down. Good-bye."

Fifteen minutes later a dark, dapper, elderly man with magnificent eyes was ushered into Roger's study.

"You've brought the pearls, of course?" Roger asked.

"Yes, Mistaire Sand, I bring ze pearls," announced Count Lovoresco.

"And the letter from the Queen?"

"From 'er Majesty's secretaire," Count Lovoresco corrected. "'Ere it is." He drew from a breast pocket a square envelope with a crown and a monogram on the flap. This he handed to Sands, and as the latter opened it, he took from another pocket a purple velvet box, oval in shape, about eight inches long by two in height. On the cover appeared a gold crown, and the same monogram as that of the envelope. Roger had seen this box and its contents; so, instead of watching a tiny gold key fitted into a miniature padlock, he read the letter authorizing Count Lovoresco, in the name of his Queen, to sell in America a rope of pearls, for the benefit of the soldiers' orphans of her country.

"This clears the deck," remarked Roger. The cover of the oval box was raised, and lying in a series of concentric grooves he saw the pearls which he intended to buy for Beverley. They were two hundred and fifty in number, as he knew, and were graduated in size, the largest being as big as a giant pea. All were

exquisitely matched in shape and colour, and the one fault—if fault existed—was a blue whiteness disliked by some connoisseurs. Roger was aware, however, that Beverley loved snow-white pearls.

"Any minute Simon Lecourt may be here," he said to Lovoresco. "When he's looked at the things, I'll sign and hand you my cheque for two hundred and sixty thousand dollars."

Lovoresco smiled under his dyed moustache, but the wonderful eyes, for which men of his race are famous, lit angrily.

"You are ze most prudent of gentlemen!" he exclaimed. "Your great Franco-American pearl expert, 'e 'as valued ze pearls one time already at 'is own place, under your eye, Mistaire Sand. Now 'e 'as to come to your 'ouse! Mazette! But you must tink me a smart one, saire, if I could change false tings for real in ze last minute!"

"I think some other smart men might have changed them without you or me being smart enough to know the difference," Roger explained. "I believe in making a ship watertight before she goes to sea."

"You are right," Lovoresco said, shrugging his shoulders. "I am pleased once more to meet ze expert."

"Mr. Simon Lecourt," announced the butler.

At a quarter to four—the cheque having been signed—Roger was shaking hands with the jewel expert he had summoned, and bowing to Count Lovoresco. The pearls were his, and he was impatient for Beverley. In five or six minutes she ought to arrive.

Beverley stepped into the lift as Count Lovoresco and Simon Lecourt stepped out. As they passed she heard Roger's name, and her heart jumped. These were strangers to her, but they had perhaps been calling on Roger. What if they were connected with the past terror which had begun lately to seem as dim as a dreadful dream? What if they had been telling Roger?

Such a thought would not have come, save for the scene she had gone through. With her nerves keyed to breaking point she went up to her own floor with somewhat the sensation she might have had in stepping from the tumbril to the guillotine. It was all she could do not to scream at Sister Lake in the hall; and when Roger appeared also it seemed to Beverley that she would faint.

Roger did not share the nurse's interest in Clo's outing; but he wanted Beverley.

"Good girl!" he exclaimed, trying to be gay. "You're back ahead of time. Send one of the servants down with money for Miss Riley. Come into the study; I've got something to show you. When you've seen it you'll know why I asked you to be home by four."

"I'll be there in a minute!" Beverley answered. "Let me take off my hat first. I've rather a headache!"

She turned toward her room, hoping that Roger would wait in the study, thus giving her a chance to find what she had to find, and take it to Clo in the waiting auto. But Roger, remorseful already for his disloyal thought connecting her with O'Reilly, followed.

"If you'd a prophetic soul," he said, "your headache would go. Are you good at guessing, Bev?"

The girl was at her wits' end. Already she had almost fibbed, in explaining Clo's errand. If only, now, she could have five minutes' grace!

"You ought to know I never guess anything right!" she laughed. "It's not quite four. Show me the wonderful thing just as the clock strikes!"

Roger pulled out his watch. "All right, baby!" he teased her. "You've got just three minutes and a half. Perhaps you think a woman needs that time to take off her hat; I'll show you you're wrong!"

He neatly extracted a hat pin which Beverley had twisted into her veil. Then off came the hat. Roger led his wife by the hand to the door of his study. Beverley was in despair. Her one cause for thankfulness lay in the fact that he had forgotten Clo. If he'd remembered to send down money, the girl would have been bewildered, and perhaps have come in to ask for instructions. There was room in Beverley's brain for no other thought than "How am I to get that parcel and give it to Clo?"

"Shut your eyes," said Roger. "The clock's going to strike four now; don't open your eyes till it stops."

Beverley obeyed, as in that mood she would have obeyed an order to stand still and be shot through the heart. "One—two," slowly struck the grandfather clock in the corner; and she felt something cool and heavy dropped over her neck.

"Three—four!" the clock finished. "Open your eyes," Roger gave the signal.

"Oh!" cried Beverley, almost aghast. On her delicate gray dress the double line of pearls glistened like huge drops of dew on a spider-web. The rope hung down below her waist, and each pearl had a light in its heart as if it held the ghost of a rainbow. "It can't be true! It's a dream!" the girl stammered. She loved pearls, and knew that these were marvels beyond common knowledge. But oh, if they could have come to her at another time!

She managed, however, to put a world of emotion into one kiss and clasp of her arms. Her silent anguish was disguised as awe. By this time she had an inspiration. She felt like the Queen of New York, she said. She must run to her room for a look in the glass, as there was only a weird old convex mirror in the study. In just a minute—or maybe two minutes—she would come back. She could have sobbed out "Thank God!" when Roger, laughing at her vanity, let her go. This time he did not follow. He stood examining the purple velvet case with the Queen's crown and monogram. He had not told Beverley the price he had given for the pearls. He wondered if she guessed that they had cost a fortune. Why didn't she come back?

Beverley had not even thrown a glance at the mirror. In her own room she tore open the drawer where her handkerchiefs were kept in rose-scented sachet cases. The largest of these cases she snatched, throwing the contents back into the drawer. With fingers that shook, she ripped the top of the padded silk cushion, and extracted a long envelope sealed with three gold seals. She would hardly have remembered the Queen's pearls had the rope not caught in the key of the drawer as she turned hastily to go. Before she could save it, the string broke, and pearls big as peas began falling like hailstones.

With a cry, she caught the broken ends of the rope together, dragged it over her head and bundled it into the drawer among scattered handkerchiefs. She did not even stop to close the drawer. As for the fallen pearls—a dozen at least—there was no time to think of them, or of what Roger would say when he heard of the accident.

Crushing on her hat, which still lay on the bed where Roger had thrown it, she ran from the room, stuffing the envelope into her handbag. Luck favoured her. She got out of the flat and into the lift without being seen.

When five minutes had passed and Beverley was still away, Roger decided to join her. He opened the bedroom door, and looked in. Something rolled away

from Roger's foot on the threshold. He stooped and picked the thing up: it was an enormous pearl.

A shock of fear thrilled through him. He thought that news of his purchase might already have reached the underworld. In these few minutes, while he calmly waited for Beverley, she might have been murdered. Things like that did happen. He stepped on a second pearl, and saw that others lay on the pale rose carpet. He stood staring. At the foot of the bed a tall screen had been placed to keep the light from Beverley's eyes in the morning. What if behind it he should find her lying?

As he braced himself to go and look, Beverley herself came into the room. It seemed that she shrank at sight of him.

"I thought you'd been kidnapped or killed!" he gasped. "What's happened?"

"N-n-nothing," she stammered. "It was only—we forgot about Clo—I had to take her that money. I——" She broke off, seeing the pearl in Roger's hand. "Oh, wasn't it dreadful that the rope snapped?" she hurried on. "I wanted to get back to you quickly. I knew the pearls were safe here. I just shut the door, and ran down."

"So I see," Roger said drily. All the joy he had felt in his splendid gift was gone.

"What are a few pearls more or less compared to Miss Riley's convenience?"

"Oh, Roger!" Beverley burst into tears. "Don't look at me like that! Don't speak to me like that! You think I don't value the pearls? I do!—for themselves, and for your love! I acted on impulse——"

"Quite so. You've done that before. Don't apologize, my dear girl. It's not worth it. I care less for the things than you do. Ring for your maid and let her sweep them up. I dare say she'll find them all to-day or to-morrow!"

"No," said Beverley, fighting back the hysterical sobs that choked her. "No, I won't have anyone look for the pearls but myself. Unless you, Roger, would show your forgiveness by helping me?"

"I have an appointment," he answered. "I'm late for it now. I shall have to go at once."

It was not true. He had no appointment. But he felt that he must be alone, and

out of doors, in the fresh air.

Clo Riley, returning from her errand at the Hotel Westmorland, did not see him as she tripped from car to door, but Roger on his way home saw the girl hurry in as if each second were important. Hardly had she vanished when a man strolled round the corner. He was walking slowly, and looking up at the façade as if interested. Roger, at the farther end of the block, recognized Justin O'Reilly.

# VIII

## BEVERLEY TALKS

Clo remembered Beverley's instructions, and went straight to her own room, but the threat of the ferret-man rang in her ears. "Tell your lady friend a life will pay for this. She's got till ten o'clock to-night, and not a minute more."

It was now after five, and Sister Lake was firmly bent upon undressing her charge. Clo had to let herself be tucked into bed. Meekly also she received the order to lie quite still and rest till dinner time.

Rest! As though she could rest, not knowing what ought to be done next to help the Angel! A passive plan occurred to Clo, which could do no harm, and her quick wit suggested how best to carry it out.

"I'll be as good as gold," she promised, "if you'll forgive me, Sister, and do me a favour. I feel sick because I spoilt your afternoon! You stayed in, waiting for me to come back, instead of taking your walk. Will you go out now, instead? I'll rest better if you will. Do, please!"

All Clo's Irish powers of persuasion were needed to coax Sister into consenting. Eventually she relented. Clo could have sung for joy as Sister Lake bade her "good-bye for an hour." As the door of the room closed, the girl began counting the seconds which must pass before the outer door shut.

"Sixty-two—sixty-three—she ought to be gone!" Clo was whispering, when her heart sank. The room door opened. She feared that Sister Lake had changed her mind; but it was the Angel who came in.

"I was racking my brain how to get rid of Sister when I saw her go out," Beverley said. "I'm sure you managed it. I've been desperate. You can't think what things have happened! Tell me, did all go well?"

The blow must be struck. In a few words Clo described the scene at the Westmorland; told how the ferret-man had kept her waiting; how he had said that the envelope looked all right, but had insisted upon opening it; how he had flown into a rage at finding only folded sheets of blank paper.

"Blank paper!" Beverley gasped. "But that's impossible! I know what was in the envelope. There were letters. The man must have tricked you."

Clo shook her head.

"I was watching him. He had no time, or chance, to play a trick. The blank paper was there, and nothing else. It was writing paper, quite a lot of sheets that seemed to have been taken from some train, 'Santa Fé Limited,' or a name like that."

Beverley gave a cry, as if she had been struck over the heart.

"Let me think," she groaned. "How can that have been? Writing paper taken from the train?"

Suddenly she turned, and came back to the bed, putting out her hands in a groping way to Clo. The girl caught and held them tightly. They were very cold.

"Angel! is there nothing I can do?" she whispered.

Beverley sank on the bed once more.

"My head feels as if I'd been given ether," she said. "I can't think things out clearly. That isn't like me! A terrible day! One shock after another. If I talk to you, will you swear by all that's sacred never to give away one word?"

"I swear by my love for you. That's the most sacred thing I have, except my locket with mother's picture," the girl answered.

"You see," Beverley went on, "I've no one else but you, Clo. If I told my husband anything, I should have to tell all. I daren't do that. Not because I couldn't trust him. But I've taken an oath ten times more solemn than the one you took just now, to keep a secret that isn't only mine. Another's life depends on the secret being kept. To save that life I was forced to do what I hate to think of. And it's no concern of yours, but it would be Roger's if he had the faintest inkling! Now, I'm going to tell you one or two things, and you must use your brains to explain the mystery. You're clever, and true as steel. You've proved that! Suppose a case; suppose you'd undertaken a dangerous mission. You have in your charge some documents which could make or break a man. You know you'll be followed. You nearly miss your train, but you jump on board at the last minute. You see a man—not the one you expect, but another just as much to be feared—more, perhaps, because he's a great deal cleverer, if not so violent. You think

you're lost, but you find a friend, a man who helps you. You give him the envelope that has the papers in it—a sealed envelope. You've seen it, Clo! He keeps it through the journey. At a stopping place on the way he offers to hand it back to you, but you refuse. You feel that the thing is safer with him. Later, in New York, he returns the envelope intact, the seals unbroken. This friend who comes to the rescue is the soul of honour. Never since that moment has the envelope been out of your own keeping. Yet it is opened to-day for the first time, and the papers that were in it are gone, changed for stationery of that train, the 'Santa Fé Limited.' How can this have been done? Who did it?"

"The other man must have done it, the one who followed you on to the train."

"But he was never near Rog ... never near the man who ... oh, I might as well tell you right out that it was Roger who kept the envelope for me. I'll tell you the name of the other man, too. It's sure to slip out! His name is Justin O'Reilly."

"O'Reilly?" Clo echoed. "How dare the brute have a name like mine?"

"Why, so it is like," said Beverley. "But there's an 'O,' and he spells it differently."

"Beast! He'd better, or I'd have to change," snapped Clo. "Well, whatever his name is, I believe he must have stolen your papers. Can you go back, and live over again every step of the way?"

Beverley shut her eyes, and began to think aloud. "The morning after we started Roger mentioned meeting an acquaintance ... a man named O'Reilly. He didn't dream the name meant anything to me. They exchanged only a few words when Roger passed O'Reilly's table at breakfast time. Nothing could have happened then, I know. Afterward, I never heard of their meeting again through the whole journey. I should have heard, if they had, I think. Roger was with me a good deal. At Chicago.—Let me see!...

"I'm calling it back to my mind. Roger helped me out of the train. O'Reilly was out already. He stood on the platform, looking for someone—or so it seemed. We went quite close to him, but not close enough for even the smartest pickpocket in America to steal the envelope from Roger."

"Where was the envelope then?" the girl wanted to know.

"In an inside breast pocket of Roger's coat; not an overcoat. It was September. The weather was hot."

"Wouldn't it be easy for any one looking for the envelope to see that Mr. Sands had something thick and long in an inside breast pocket, and suspect what it was?"

"Any one might suspect. No one could be sure. It would have shown more plainly if Roger had worn his coat buttoned. He didn't, on purpose."

"Still, his coat not being buttoned would make it easier to steal the envelope, if somebody very clever got a chance to try."

"Perhaps. But O'Reilly could never have done such a thing. It would take a trained thief."

"Can people send off telegrams from those Limited trains?" Clo took up her catechism again.

"Yes, of course they can."

"Would there have been time for this O'Reilly chap to wire Chicago, after he followed you on board the train, and have a man meet him?"

"Yes, plenty of time."

"Well, what if he wired to some detective people, and told them to send him the 'smartest pickpocket in America'?"

"But ... the police couldn't ... wouldn't ... do such a thing!"

"I don't mean the real police," Clo explained. "Haven't you often read books about private detectives? I have. They might get reformed thieves to work for them. Can you remember what O'Reilly did next, after you both passed him on the platform?"

"No. I didn't look back."

"You don't know, then, whether the person he seemed to expect ever turned up?"

Beverley shook her head. "Roger and I went straight ahead to a newsstand where *I* expected to meet a person. Two or three minutes after we passed O'Reilly we were mixed up in a big crowd, almost fighting our way through...."

"Oh, a big crowd!" Clo broke in. "A chance for that pickpocket. Suppose he came the minute you had turned your backs on O'Reilly, and he sent his trained thief after you, hot foot, to get that envelope?"

"Ah, but you've forgotten something!" cried Beverley. "A thief might get the envelope: I'll admit that. But how could he have another one exactly like it, with the same seals, the same monogram, to put into Roger's pocket, when he took the original?"

"He could only have it if O'Reilly could have given it to him. Could he have done that?"

Suddenly Beverley began to see. A vivid idea sprang into her head, and was imaged in her eyes.

"You've thought of something!" Clo exclaimed. "You see how O'Reilly might have got the seal with the monogram, and the gold wax, and an envelope like the one you had?"

"Oh, yes. I do see!" Beverley groaned. "He could have brought the things from —from.... But never mind. That part's nothing to you."

"I want only to know the part you want me to know," said Clo.

"It isn't a question of what I want. It's a question of my sacred oath," Beverley answered. "There was a house where I had been, to get the envelope. O'Reilly was there, too. Someone ... no matter who! ... could have given him all the things, so he could change envelopes if he got the chance. Oh, child, I keep stumbling on to a path where I dare not step."

"We'll go back to the train," said Clo. "If O'Reilly had the gold wax and the seal, and the right kind of envelope, he could have made his plan, and sent his telegram, and had everything ready for the right minute ... in the Chicago station."

"Ye—es, he could. But it's almost impossible!"

"It's more possible than Mr. Sands' changing the envelopes, isn't it?"

"That is the one impossible thing. The worst remains. I have lost the papers! Whether O'Reilly has them or someone else, I can't get them back. Without them, I'm ruined!"

"You shan't be!" Clo cried, twining her thin arms round her idol's waist. "You must be saved somehow. We've got till ten o'clock to think."

"If I were the only one, it wouldn't matter so much," Beverley said. "But there's somebody who can be tortured as well as killed, if I have no bribe to offer. Those papers gave me all the power I had."

"Wouldn't money...." Clo began, but Beverley cut her short.

"No money I could get would be of any use," she said. "A million might be!"

"See O'Reilly and make him give up the papers!" cried Clo. "Oh, but is he in New York?"

"He doesn't live in New York, but he's here now. I know, because that man you saw, Peterson, told me. It was part of a threat he held over my head that O'Reilly and some people connected with him should be in town just now. I know the hotel he's staying in, the Dietz. But even if O'Reilly would come, how could I see him without Roger knowing? It wouldn't be possible!"

"I'll somehow make O'Reilly come," the girl promised. "I don't know how, yet, but I know I will, if you can get Mr. Sands out of the house."

Beverley shuddered. "How horrid that sounds ... as if I were plotting against him, the way women do who deceive their husbands."

"Well, anyhow, if O'Reilly took the papers, would he still have them, do you think?" asked Clo, with the sudden eagerness of one who catches in desperation at a new idea.

"It's just possible. I can see a reason why he might have been asked to keep them," Beverley answered.

"If that's so, would he put them in a bank, or a safe somewhere, or would he bring them to New York?"

"There might be a special motive for him to bring them to New York ... I think there would be a motive."

"Well, it seems to me, the sort of man I imagined he is, would be too smart to have such things on him if he came to your house, and didn't mean to give 'em back to you. It would be tempting Providence, so to speak!"

"If I were the kind of woman he thinks I am, he'd not expect me to stop short of murder to get those papers," and Beverley laughed a bitter little laugh.

"Good! If he comes to you and leaves the papers at his hotel, a certain thing will happen, but it's safer for you not to know—till afterward."

# IX

## THE BLUFF THAT FAILED

"You must tell me!" Beverley insisted. "Tell me at once!"

"While Mr. O'Reilly is here with you, Miss Riley without the 'O', will be at his hotel, in his room, helping herself to his—I mean your—papers."

"My child, you're mad!" Beverley gasped.

"Not so mad as *he*'ll be when he finds out," crowed the girl. "Hurray! The whole business is settling itself in my head. The one trouble is Mr. Sands. The rest will be all right. Think what to do about him, Angel; think hard!"

Beverley thought until her brain whirled.

"I might suggest Roger's dining at his club," she said. "But how I should hate to do that! He's vexed already. He has a right to be! This afternoon he gave me a wonderful present, a rope of pearls that belonged to a Queen. It must have cost a quarter of a million! I hardly stopped to thank him, I was in such frantic haste to get the envelope to you. The rope caught in the key of a drawer; the string broke, and a lot of pearls ran all over the carpet. I didn't wait to pick them up. I ran down to you, and I was gone so long Roger went to my room to look for me. I came back and found him picking up pearls. I felt my excuses did more harm than good. Roger pretended that he had an engagement. I saw by his face he wanted to walk off his anger in the fresh air. If he does walk it off—if he comes back ready to make up, and I send him away again, perhaps that will finish it! Things may never be the same between us any more!"

"He was angry because you didn't seem to care enough for his present," said Clo. "But if you can get him out of the house for an hour or so, and at the same time prove that you adore the pearls; how does that plan strike you?"

"How could I do both?"

"Beg him to go fetch a pearl-stringer, and bring her back here himself, to-night. Say you can't rest or sleep till the pearls are restrung."

"You forget it's Sunday, and——"

"I don't forget. But I know a pearl-stringer. She isn't just any old pearl-stringer, who might thread on a wax bead here and there, and keep a pearl or two up her sleeve. She's the best pearl-stringer in New York. The big jewellers and lots of swell society women have her. It's queer the way I came to know her, but it makes it good for us. We were crossing a street, she and I. I didn't know the woman from Adam—Eve, I mean. But it was slippery, and she missed her footing. I dragged her back, just in time, and held her up. She's a little woman, no bigger than me, or I couldn't have done it. But I got her on the sidewalk again, and she was grateful. She's Irish, too, and she invited me to go and see her the next Sunday. It's out at Yonkers, where she lives, in a nice little house she's bought. I went there once. She said if she could do some favour for me, she'd love to. But it's no favour I'll be asking, except for her to come out on a Sunday evening. So the only thing is to fetch her. Do you think Mr. Sands will go?"

"It depends upon how he feels when he comes in," said Beverley. "But Sister Lake would never let you out again."

"I shan't ask her. I'll get up and dress while you see if Mr. Sands is back. If I hear from you that all's well, I'll slip out before Sister comes."

"Clo, you're wonderful!" Beverley exclaimed. "How can I thank you enough?"

"Thanks from you to me! That's good! Just wait, Angel, anyhow, till I've done something. Oh, I forgot to give you the pearl-stringer's address. It's Miss Blackburne, 27 Elm Street, Yonkers. And tell Mr. Sands to mention my name. It might make a difference. She doesn't like leaving her mother in the evenings, but she'd do it for me."

Beverley was gone for fifteen minutes. When she flew in again she was surprised to see Clo in bed as before. But hardly was the door closed when the girl threw back the coverlet, to show that she was fully dressed.

"I was afraid Sister might pop in—by an evil chance," she explained. "I've only to put on my hat. Well, is it all right?"

"Roger will go," said Beverley. "He's 'phoning now for his car. I'm putting off dinner till half-past eight so he can have plenty of time to get home and change. He didn't make any difficulty when I told him about the pearl-stringer and wanting her at once. He agreed with me that it would be best to do such an

errand himself, if it were to be done. And he was very kind. But his manner was different. I'm frightened."

"Don't be," said Clo. She was up now, had pinned on the pretty white hat, and was fastening her smart little cape. "I'll go first to the Westmorland and see our man; he said he'd be in, waiting till ten. I'll tell him things are in train, but he must give you till midnight, if necessary. From there perhaps I can 'phone the Dietz Hotel. It wouldn't be safe here. By that time O'Reilly ought to be in his room dressing for dinner. He'll see me, I'm sure, and the rest will arrange itself. Now, I'm off before Mr. Sands' automobile comes, or Sister Lake. If she finds the door shut and all quiet she'll think I'm asleep. Go back to your husband, Angel, and I'll slip away on my little jaunt."

"I've brought money for you," said Beverley. "Take this purse. There's change for taxis and lots of bills besides—fifty or sixty dollars."

Two minutes later Clo was in the street. The first thing that happened to her was a small piece of luck. She had been dreading the walk to a taxi-stand, when she saw a car about to drive away from a house near by. It was a public vehicle. Clo hailed the chauffeur and gave the Westmorland as her destination.

"Mr. Peterson" was in, according to promise.

"You again, is it? I looked for Mrs. Sands," he grumbled.

"I'm her messenger for the second time," said Clo, "and probably I shall be for the third, when it comes to settling up. If you get what you want, it doesn't matter who brings it, I suppose?"

"Then you suppose wrong. My business is with a woman, not a kid! All the same, if you've got anything for me——"

"I haven't—yet!" Clo snapped him up. "It isn't time. But I'm on to where the thing is, and how to get it. Only it may take till after ten o'clock. That's what I came to say."

"Save your breath! Ten o'clock's the time. If she doesn't want me to go back on my bargain she'd better not go back on hers."

He looked more than ever like a ferret, the girl thought.

"Mrs. Sands made no bargain as to time," she said. "And talking of time, what

about the time *you've* done?"

Peterson gave a cackling laugh. "What's the female for 'Smart Aleck'?" he sneered. "Guessed by my complexion, did yuh? Well, I don't need to make no secret of it. My gardeens wished me good-bye and Lord bless me when the nine months they run me in for was up."

Clo thought she could come close to guessing what the charge had been, and it would have needed more than the word of a ferret to assure her of his "innocence." The man was a born sneak-thief or pickpocket. His hands were slim and small as a girl's. Perhaps if temptation had been put in his way while he "waited at the newsstand" for Beverley, all those months ago, he had been unable to resist and thus had missed his appointment. Not that the girl much cared as to this detail; it was not her affair. But it was odd, almost "creepy," how the links were being joined together in the chain of evidence against O'Reilly, the man who had followed Angel into the Limited—the man against whom Clo had presently to try her wits. What concerned her most was that her first attempt at bluff had failed. Something in Peterson's manner forced her to believe that he had indeed served out his full sentence, and for the moment had nothing to fear from the police. Clodagh hid her disappointment with a little swagger.

"It suits us just as well as you, to finish up at ten o'clock and get it over," she said. "If we can, we will. If we can't, you'll have to wait. The way things are, you have to be in with us, you see, not against us."

"Oh, do I? I ain't so sure!" he flung back. "I ain't sure my fine madam's not in the game t'other way round—and her husband, too. I know now that she and Roger Sands travelled in the same train from where she started. Blowed if I see why she'd do it, but it might be they fixed a frame-up between them. I can see why it would suit Sands, if it wouldn't her, and a man's stronger than a woman. Sands was working for John Heron at the time. That means a lot."

"It doesn't mean that Mrs. Sands would be disloyal to her word. I know she's true as steel," Clo insisted. She spoke crisply, but her thoughts wandered. They had caught at the name of John Heron; Beverley had never mentioned it. The girl had no means of guessing how it might bear upon the case now in her small, determined hands. She did not see how, or where, she could have heard it before, yet it did not sound strange to her. The feeling she had on hearing it puzzled and even thrilled her vaguely. It was as if the name, "John Heron," had been whispered into her ear in a dream—a dream not forgotten, but buried under other

things in her brain. The girl was suddenly alert. There was only one fact which she grasped with straining certainty. In that buried dream there were other sounds connected with the whispered name: sounds of sobbing, as of someone crying in the dark.

"Anyhow," Peterson went on, "there was a frame-up, and those that was in it has got to pay me for what I went through. That's partly why I'm here in Noo York. If I don't have those papers by ten I'll show up at the Sands flat and ask for the missis."

"You wouldn't find Mr. Sands at home," the girl cut in. "He's out. When he comes back he's likely to go away again at once."

"Aw, he is, is he?" echoed Peterson. His personality waked up secretively, like that of some weak, night animal hiding in a wood. Clo eyed him, striving to make him out.

"Better go home, kiddy," he advised. His tone was good-natured. "Shall I see you back to where you live, or——"

"I have another errand to do," the girl announced with dignity. She had meant to telephone from the Westmorland to the Dietz, and learn if Justin O'Reilly was in; but now she determined not to do so. Better waste a little time rather than Peterson should hear her inquiring for O'Reilly. Instead of waiting to telephone, she walked to the door and asked a half-baked youth in hotel livery to call her a taxi.

"If ferret-face tries to follow I'll lead him a dance!" she thought. But ferret-face seemed to read her mind, and be willing to relieve it.

"So long!" he said. "I've got a job o' work, too. It will take me till about ten. After that I shall be lookin' for a call from you or her ladyship."

He turned his back and sauntered to the elevator. Before the taxi had arrived he had been shot up to regions above.

"So that's all right!" Clo muttered to herself, spinning toward the Dietz. Yet, as she said the words, she wondered if it *was* all right. Why had Peterson's whole personality made a kind of "lightning change" on hearing that Sands (whom he expressed a wish to see) would not be at home that night? Ought she to 'phone to Beverley and put her on guard? Yes, she would telephone from the Dietz, while waiting to see O'Reilly. It would be safe, because Roger by this time should be far away.

# X

## THE BLUFF THAT WON

Justin O'Reilly had a modest suite in the magnificent Dietz. It adjoined the luxurious suite of Mr. and Mrs. John Heron, and consisted of a small sitting-room, a bedroom, and bath. He was tying his necktie when the telephone bell rang. He grabbed the receiver as if it were a snake that had to be throttled, and gave it a grudging "Hello!"

"A lady to see you," a voice answered.

"She wasn't told I'm in, I hope? A nice thing for a well-regulated hotel if——"

"No, but she says it's important. She's Miss O'Reilly."

Miss O'Reilly! The man of that name was perplexed. The only Miss O'Reilly who, as far as he knew, could possibly call on him, was the last woman he would have expected to do so. He had come to New York largely in the hope of seeing her. She had refused to see him.

"Tell her I'll be down in three minutes," he replied.

"She particularly doesn't want you to come down. She says she has some private news for you, and asks if you'll see her in your own sitting-room."

"All right," he tried to answer calmly. "Have the lady shown up."

He rushed back into his bedroom to wrestle once more with the tie. He must be ready to receive Miss O'Reilly at the door, and his waistcoat and coat were yet to put on. But it could be managed. The suite was on the fifteenth floor, and a full minute's walk from the lift for an old person like Miss O'Reilly. Bungling everything in his haste, he tried to think what it might mean. It looked as if she must have changed her mind, and be ready to sell him her house, the dear old house on which he had set his heart. Perhaps she would demand a higher price than he had offered. Well, he must pay it somehow. Heron would lend him the money—but no, there were reasons why O'Reilly didn't wish to accept favours from Heron, often as they had been pressed upon him. As he slipped into his coat, he heard the expected rap at his sitting-room door, and hurried to open it. A

page-boy, acting as guide, had run ahead of the lady, to knock.

"Miss O'Reilly to see Mr. O'Reilly," he announced, with Irish relish of the Irish name. Then he erased himself. O'Reilly stood on the threshold, waiting for the right lady to appear, and meanwhile dodged back from the wrong one, a small, slim flapper in white, who for some reason had paused before his door. She stood quite still, and stared up at him unwinkingly, as a child stares.

"I beg your pardon," O'Reilly said, wanting to laugh. "May I pass? I must look for a lady who——"

"I'm the lady," the creature in white intervened. "That is, I am if you are Mr. O'Reilly."

"O'Reilly's my name," he admitted. "But I was expecting—or—perhaps my cousin sent you?"

"Perhaps I am your cousin," suggested the girl who (Justin saw, now that he looked her deliberately in the face) had the biggest, blackest eyes, and the whitest skin he had ever seen. She had, also, red hair under a fetching hat. Although the child was no beauty, she had an amusing, elfin air.

"Delighted, I'm sure," he felt obliged to answer. "I thought I had only one cousin in the world, Theresa O'Reilly, of Gramercy Park. But——"

"It sounds like the chorus of a song; 'Theresa O'Reilly, of Gramercy Park,'" Clo was unable to resist remarking, with her strongest brogue. "Will you please ask me in?" she said. "My errand's very pressing."

Mechanically the man stepped aside and let her walk into the room. He began to suspect that he had been "spoofed." He did not invite the young person to be seated, but looked at her expectantly. Her first move was to shut the door. She did not speak.

"May I know your name?" he inquired, as they faced each other.

"The same as yours, but for a letter or two," said Clo, marking time. "That's why I may be a cousin; one never knows. I didn't come to talk about the family tree, though, Mr. O'Reilly. I came to beg—not for money, so don't be frightened."

"I'm not conscious of fear," laughed O'Reilly. He couldn't help laughing. He didn't believe the girl's name was the "same as his." "If I'm not afraid, I am

curious," he confessed. "What are you going to beg for, if not money? Is this a message from my cousin——?"

Clo ceased suddenly to be impish. She had got into the enemy's fastness by her impishness, but she could go no further on that line. This man, being the exact opposite of the type expected, upset her plan. A big danger was that she might like this O'Reilly instead of hating him, he was so pleasant and gallant-looking, more a protector than a persecutor of women. She might hesitate to cheat or trick him in whatever way came handy, and thus fail the Angel on top of all her boasts. In her hot little heart Clo prayed for the wisdom of the serpent, and as her elfin face took on anxious lines, she became more interesting to O'Reilly. Her white face looked pinched and desperate. "If I were Marat, and she Charlotte Corday," was the thought that jumped into his head, "she would stab me."

"It's a good thing for me you have a cousin, or maybe you wouldn't have let me in. I know now why God gave me the name of Riley. I guess he'll forgive me for borrowing the 'O.' I was obliged to get to you somehow. That was the one way I could think of."

"It was a pretty smart way," O'Reilly flattered her. "But you haven't told me ——"

"I will. Only—I think I'll have to sit down. I feel rather—queer——"

"Good lord! You can't faint here!"

"I won't, unless you make me, I'll promise that!" She had her cue now.

"Sit down, for heaven's sake!" said O'Reilly, pulling up the biggest chair in the room. Clo sank into it. Closing her eyes, she drew in a gasping breath which made her girlish bosom heave.

The man stood by, feeling absurdly helpless.

"Shall I ring for brandy?" he suggested.

"No—please!" She opened her great eyes again. "Only listen. I've come from Mrs. Roger Sands—to beg you for those papers of hers."

"Mrs. Roger Sands! Her papers? I know nothing of any papers belonging to Mrs. Roger Sands," O'Reilly exclaimed. "What papers are you talking about?"

"The ones you hired a man to steal when the train got to Chicago."

O'Reilly started. "Whose accusation is that?" he asked sharply.

"Not hers; it's mine."

"Yours! Once again, who are you? What are you in this?"

"I'm nobody! I'm only—a lion's mouse."

O'Reilly did not ask what it meant to be a lion's mouse. He understood. His mind was not less quick than hers.

"And I'm the net you hope to gnaw! Miss Mouse, your little teeth will find me tough. I may say I'm a patent, ungnawable net. The best thing for you is to go home as fast as you can and tell those who sent you——"

"I sent myself," Clo explained, with tired obstinacy. "I told you I had to see you somehow. Oh, Mr. O'Reilly, you don't look the sort of cruel pig I thought you would be. If you dreamed what Mrs. Sands is going through you'd give her back the papers. Don't pretend not to know what I mean."

"I won't pretend anything," O'Reilly said. "I do know what you mean, and I got the documents (which were not the property of Mrs. Sands) more or less as you think I got them. But no mouse, no mastodon could induce me to hand them over to your friend."

Clo's eyes travelled over his person. He looked slim and soldierly in his well-made evening clothes. There could be nothing thicker than a watch, and that a thin one, in his pockets.

"If you would see Mrs. Sands, maybe you'd change your mind," she pleaded, in her creamiest Irish voice. "Take me back to her, and take the papers along. Then, if you——"

"I can't do either," was O'Reilly's ultimatum. "I'll take you downstairs and put you in your car if you've got one, or a taxi if you haven't. But——"

"You'll have to take me home," said Clo. "I won't try to start without you. I've gone through enough. I'll just let myself collapse. I promised not to faint unless you made me. Now you are making me."

"You deserve to be thrown out of the window!"

"I have been, once," the pale girl announced. "It was four storeys up, and all my

ribs were smashed. This is my first day out of bed. I thought I could manage it, if you were kind. I'd gladly die for Mrs. Sands. And if I do——"

"Brace up!" O'Reilly cried. "I'll take you home. I know where the house is. I passed it this afternoon. There was a man who——But no matter. Have you got a car below?"

Clo was almost past answering; almost, not quite. But weakness was her "cue," as well as the line of least resistance. Having now an incentive to let herself go rather than "brace up" as O'Reilly urged, she enjoyed collapsing. Yet something within was on guard, and knew that O'Reilly had to be watched.

He dashed to the telephone and ordered a taxi. Then he returned to the girl in the chair. Her eyes were half shut, a rim of white showing between the lashes. The man could not help believing the queer story she had gasped out, about the fall, and the broken ribs, and this being the first day she had left her bed. That would account for her thinness and paleness. He touched her hand, which hung over the arm of the chair. There was no glove on it, and the pathetically small thing was icy cold.

"She's fainted, fast enough," he growled. Clo heard the words dimly, as though she had cotton wool in her ears. Her duty was to trick the man, but she didn't like doing that duty.

O'Reilly gently laid down the tiny paw he had taken in his. It was limp as the hand of a dead girl. Clo would have felt less compunction if he had dropped it roughly. He took a few brisk steps, as though he had come to some decision. She forced herself back from the brink of unconsciousness to realize that he was going toward the door—not the outer door, through which she had entered, but another. He opened this, and Clo saw that beyond was a bedroom. Quickly he went to a table where stood a tall glass jug filled with crushed ice and water. His back was turned to the girl as he began pouring the jug's contents into a tumbler, but suddenly, as if on a strong impulse, he turned. Clo did not even quiver. Something told her that the thing she had prayed for was about to happen.

# XI

## O'REILLY'S WAISTCOAT POCKET

O'Reilly's first look into the sitting room was not for the girl. Involuntarily, it seemed, he sent a lightning glance to the left, to that side of the room farthest from the big chair where she sat. Clo's desperate need to know what was in his head inspired her with clairvoyance. Consciousness lit her brain once more. She was sure that she had read his thoughts. He feared that after all she was fooling him. He was saying in his mind: "What if she meant me to go and fetch this water while she looks for what she wants to find?"

Now Clo was certain at last, not only of his having the papers, but that they were in the room, somewhere on that left side, where his glance had flashed. It was hard to keep still, without the flicker of an eyelash; but she believed, as O'Reilly came back to her, that she had stood the test of his stare.

He moistened his handkerchief, and gingerly dabbed the girl's forehead. It was a relief to "come to," to be able to start, and draw a long breath.

"There! You're better, aren't you?" he asked.

"Yes," she breathed. "I should like to go home, but I'm afraid——"

"Don't be. I'm going with you," he said. "By this time a taxi's waiting for us. Do you think you can walk if I give you my arm?"

"I'll try," Clo answered, gratefully.

No pretence of weakness was needed. She felt like a rag. O'Reilly took her by the hand, and with an arm round the slim waist raised the girl to her feet. Once up, she swayed as if she might fall, but he held her firmly. "Lean against me," he said, in a kind voice.

She had never before been so near to a man in her life. "You're very good to me," she whispered. "I should like you, please, to remember that I thank you."

"I'm sorry I said you deserved to be thrown out of the window," O'Reilly absolved himself. "Whatever else you may be, you're a good plucked one. Now,

here we are at the door. Are you sure you can walk to the elevator? Hang on to my arm."

She hung on to it.

They reached the lift, which came to them in a few seconds, unoccupied save for the youth who ran it. Clodagh kept up bravely until she was seated in the taxi, and could have kept up until the end without too great an effort, for her collapse had made her feel rested. It was not, however, the girl's métier to "keep up." The task was but half accomplished. The hardest part was to come.

She knew—or thought she knew—that O'Reilly had the papers, that they were in New York; not only in New York, but in his private sitting room at the Dietz Hotel. They were in some hiding-place there; and for an instant he had feared her knowledge of its existence. He had expected her to try, while his back was turned, to steal its contents. Clo's nimble brain, deducing all this from what had happened, deduced something else as well. The man would have had no fear if the secret were impossible for an outsider to learn. It could not be impossible. It couldn't even be difficult, if she might have solved the puzzle while his back was turned. For her, O'Reilly's uneasiness was a hopeful sign. Somewhere on the window side of his private parlour at the Dietz the papers which Angel needed were hidden. Each second during the girl's slow progress to the lift, her descent, and her short walk to the taxi, was spent in sorting out these deductions.

Those big black eyes of Clodagh Riley's had not been given her in vain. One swift glance during the cold-water treatment had shown her many details useful to remember. On one side of the window was a desk. In the desk was a drawer, and the key thereof was in the keyhole. It seemed improbable that secret papers should be kept in such a place, but circumstances might have forced O'Reilly to leave them there.

On the other side of the window was a kind of buffet, with glass doors and shelves and a closed cupboard, but Clo had less hope of this than of the desk. There might be a less obvious hiding hole than either, perhaps a sliding panel in the wall. There must in any case be a key, and that key must be on the person of O'Reilly.

She would have to use all her wits to get it while they were together in the taxi! And there was the key of the suite to get also; but that would be easier. She had seen O'Reilly take the big key from a table, as they went by, slipping it into the pocket of his dinner jacket. Forced to support his half-fainting guest, he had not

put on an outer coat, so the key was within reach of clever and determined fingers. Clodagh's were determined, and—she hoped—clever.

With this design burning in her head and tingling in her hands, she decided to faint again as they started for home, and keep O'Reilly occupied every inch of the way.

"I'm afraid—I'm not so strong—after all——" she sighed, as the taxi door shut, and proceeded to "flop" like a large rag doll. Her head fell on the man's breast, and rolled across to his left arm, her hat askew.

"I'm very ill," she moaned. "Something hurts so! My hat-pin——" And her voice trailed into silence.

"Poor child!" the man exclaimed, completely taken in at last. The hat-pin was sticking in very deep! Not that she minded a little pain. But the great thing was to keep O'Reilly's hands busy.

Clumsily, obstinately, he fumbled among the meshes of ostrich plume wound around her hat. The head of the pin eluding him there, he tried beneath the brim, his fingers tangling in thick waves of hair. They were soft waves, softer and silkier than the ostrich plume. No man with blood in his veins could have touched them without a thrill. The girl on his breast, her face on his arm, one hand holding her up, another caught in her hair, O'Reilly was conscious of electric shocks.

His hands and attention thus engaged, Clo got the chance she'd waited for. Delicately, stealthily, like the "mouse" she called herself, she extracted the door key from O'Reilly's pocket. So far, so good. But the next deed would try her mettle. Lightly as a flitting shadow the small fingers moved over the man's waistcoat, from the belt line to the breast. She could feel his heart thump, and almost started, but controlled herself.

Clo had noticed that men often wore a short chain or ribbon, attached to a watch, and hanging from the waistcoat pocket with a seal, a society badge or a lucky souvenir. O'Reilly wore no ornament of that sort; but there was a watch, a thin watch which she could feel through the cloth, and some flat object with it. If she could slip a finger into that pocket without his knowing!

But now they were in Park Avenue, not far from the imposing apartment house at the corner, where Mr. and Mrs. Sands lived. Clo availed herself of a slight

bump, and showed signs of sliding off the seat. O'Reilly, who had just extracted the hat-pin and stuck it into his coat, steadied her with an effort. Fortunately there was no need to look out and stop the chauffeur. That afternoon O'Reilly had passed the building, informed by Count Lovoresco who lived there, and had looked up with a certain curiosity. He remembered the number, and in leaving the Dietz had been able to give the address.

The taxi stopped, and O'Reilly prepared to carry the fainting girl into the house. She would be a light load. As he got out of the taxi with Clo in his arms a man came forward.

"Won't you let me help you, sir?" he civilly inquired.

"You may run ahead," said O'Reilly. "I can manage the young lady myself."

The man who had offered his services disappeared into the house, and found the porter, a substantial person in livery. Clo conveniently revived when placed on the seat of the lift. O'Reilly sat by her side, supporting the limp body, her hat in his hand, while the porter shot the elevator up to the Sands' floor.

"Lord a'mighty!" the old fellow exclaimed, "if this ain't the poor child that's been an invalid all these weeks! Mrs. Sands will be in a way! Must be near eight weeks since this little gal was brought in on a stretcher, lookin' like dead. She ought to be in bed."

"Somebody should have looked after her," said O'Reilly.

"That's it, sir. Her nurse is out, gaddin'."

"Brute!" Clo heard O'Reilly mutter. And leaning comfortably against his shoulder she felt wicked, treacherous, because she had more than once applied the same epithet to him. Whatever happened, never would she do that again!

The elevator stopped. The porter touched the electric bell at the Sands' door, and almost instantly a manservant appeared. His cry of surprise brought Mrs. Sands herself out from a room at the end of the hall. The porter tried to explain everything; failed; broke off to question O'Reilly; O'Reilly answered; Beverley exclaimed; and among them, all was confusion. Clo, looking through half-shut eyes over her bearer's shoulder, saw a shadow flit between the portières. Had some one come in? If so, who could it be? Or was it only the shadow of a blowing curtain she had seen? The question did not strike her as important just then, for if any one had passed it was doubtless a servant or, at worst, Sister

Lake. Besides, Clo had much to think of; how to come back to consciousness quickly without rousing suspicion, and, when officially alive again, how to escape for the next errand.

The rush of air and babble of excited voices gave her an excuse to gasp, and stammer out a conventional "Where am I?"

"We'll get you to your room, dear," said Beverley; and Clo wondered if her acting had deceived Angel. "The butler can——"

"No, thanks, I'll manage her by myself," O'Reilly broke in and carried the white bundle along the hall.

"This is her room," Mrs. Sands explained to him. "If you will put her on the bed...."

"No—please! Take me on into the next room, Sister Lake's room. I must be there. I'll tell you why presently," the girl pleaded.

Beverley threw open the door between the two rooms, hurried ahead, and turned on a light.

"Now, lay me on this bed," Clo commanded.

Having obeyed, O'Reilly stood as if awaiting further orders. Clo glanced from him imploringly to Mrs. Sands. "I've gone through such a lot!" she moaned. "I've suffered so! I felt I could never get home alive. Please, Mr. O'Reilly—you've been kind—don't let it all be for nothing!"

"What do you want of me?" he stiffly inquired.

"Only for you to talk to Mrs. Sands. In that next room—my room. Nobody will disturb you. If the nurse comes back, she'll come into her own room first. That's why I asked you to bring me to it. I couldn't persuade you to give me the papers. Perhaps even Mrs. Sands can't persuade you. But I beg, I pray you, to give her the chance. Listen to what she has to say."

"Very well," he answered, grudgingly. "I'll do what you ask. But I'll do it for your sake."

Beverley had remained on the threshold of the next room. Now she retreated into it. O'Reilly followed; but at the door he turned. "Good-bye," he said to Clo.

"Good-bye," she echoed. "And thank you again—for everything."

She had more to thank him for than he knew—the contents of her tightly clutched hand.

# XII

## THE HORIZONTAL PANEL

Following Mrs. Sands, O'Reilly left the door between the two rooms open; but Beverley stepped quickly back and closed it.

"She's grand, the darling!" thought Clo. "Trust her to forget nothing. Her shutting that door proves how she counts on me."

The girl was deadly tired, and her head ached, yet she struggled up as the door clicked. O'Reilly had brought in her hat and dropped it on a table. There was no hat-pin, but Clo crushed the soft toque down over her masses of red hair, and hoped she was not untidy enough to be conspicuous. Unsteadily she tottered to another door—the door that led into the corridor. This faced a narrower passage to the kitchen and domestic offices of the flat. Clo would have to take that way because, if she ventured into the lift and showed herself in the hall below, the porter might take alarm. He might fear that Mrs. Sands' protégée was trying to escape for some sly purpose of her own, and refuse to let her go till he had telephoned upstairs.

In a quaint outside pocket of her new frock Clo had put the purse given her by Beverley. Through her adventures she had remembered to make sure occasionally that it had not dropped out. Now she opened the purse, selecting two ten-dollar bills and two of five dollars.

"That ought to do for 'em all," she said, "even if the lot are at home." And, money in hand, she ventured to the kitchen door. Only the chef and a woman assistant were at work.

"I'm Clo Riley, the girl Mrs. Sands has been good to," she eagerly explained. "I'm well again, and I have to go out. Mrs. Sands has a visitor, and I don't like to disturb them. Will you let me down your way?" So speaking she laid a ten-dollar bill and a five-dollar bill side by side on a table. She made no reference to the money, nor any gesture indicating it; nor did the others appear to see it.

The chef escorted her in silence to the servants' elevator. There was a button to push, and down the girl went, rejoiced at passing another stage of her journey.

Five minutes more, and she was in a taxi, tearing back to the Dietz Hotel.

This time she marched boldly to a lift in a long row of half a dozen. "Fifteenth floor, please," she said, as if she owned the hotel; and was taken up without question. "Thanks to my swell clothes!" she thought. "Not far would I get in this place if I had on my old black!"

Armed with O'Reilly's key Clo threaded her way through several corridors and arrived at the door of his suite. Her fingers shook so that she could not find the lock, and as she fumbled for it, the door of an adjoining suite opened. The nerve-tried girl started as if she had been shot, and dropped the key on the carpet.

"Silly fool!" she scolded herself as she stooped to retrieve it, and to hide her face. If only the people (she knew by the voices they were man and woman) would pass before she had to look up! But they were in no hurry to pass. They had paused in front of their own door, and were talking in low tones—about her, Clo was sure!

In a big hotel, the chances were ten to one against their knowing O'Reilly. Raising her head, she tried to eye the pair with airy arrogance.

"I mustn't seem to care," she thought, and tried to wither them with a look before again attacking the keyhole. The woman was beautiful, a glorious, dark creature, gorgeously dressed and jewelled. But oddly it was the man who riveted Clo's attention, the man whose eyes gave the girl an electric shock. He was a tall, lanky, middle-aged individual, with auburn hair and a close-cut red beard streaked with gray. He walked with shoulders bent, and had no distinction, despite his well-cut evening clothes. But from under a pair of beetling black brows there flashed a light which took Clo's breath away. She didn't know what to make of his look. It was as if she'd been struck by lightning.

"My goodness, after all he must be a friend of O'Reilly's!" she feared. Even that supposition wasn't enough to account for the flash. Frightened, she slid the key into the lock, and almost falling into the room slammed the door behind her. She did not need to lock it, for without a key it could not be opened from the outside.

"I can hold the fort a few minutes now, whatever happens!"

In the corridor John Heron and his wife lingered in front of their own door.

"Well, if that's not the queerest thing I ever saw or heard of!" Heron exclaimed.

Coming out of their suite, they had caught an impressionist glimpse of a figure in white bent over the keyhole, then the figure had stooped for the dropped key, and mechanically they had paused in surprise.

"I wonder if she's made a mistake in the room?" Mrs. Heron had whispered, and Heron had returned:

"Yes, I think that must be so. She'll find it out and go somewhere else. O'Reilly isn't——"

There he had stopped short when the girl raised her head to face them; and when she presently vanished into his friend's room like a whirlwind, he neither finished his sentence nor answered his wife.

"What's the matter, Jack?" Mrs. Heron asked. "How odd you look!"

("Jack" was not a nickname that suited Heron, but his wife thought it debonair.)

"Why don't you speak?" she persisted.

"I was thinking," Heron said at last.

"Thinking what we ought to do?" his wife caught him up. "Shall we knock and ask O'Reilly if he's ready to go down with us?"

"No. We can't do that."

"I suppose not. But weren't you going to say it isn't like O'Reilly to have a girl calling on him in his rooms?"

"I don't remember what I was going to say," he snubbed her. "It doesn't matter, anyhow. After all, why shouldn't he? What is it to us?"

"Well, I feel queer about it," objected Dolores Heron. "The creature may be a hotel thief?"

"Nonsense!" fumed the man. "The girl was a child—sixteen or seventeen. We can't mix ourselves up in such an affair. Let's mind our own business."

"You needn't be so cross. I haven't done anything," Dolores reproached him. They went down together, and sat side by side on a rose-coloured brocade sofa in the immense salon generally known as the "hall." Not one of the ladies present was handsomer than Mrs. Heron, not one had more beautiful jewels or a more perfect dress, and all the men openly admired her—except her own husband.

Upstairs the girl in question was making the most of every moment. The queer little key attached to O'Reilly's watch couldn't belong to the desk, still, there might be a box inside the desk which it would fit. Clo searched everywhere and everything. At last, it seemed that nothing was left to try, when suddenly she recalled a paragraph in a newspaper. She had seen it in a Sunday Supplement. Why, yes, Miss Blackburne, the pearl-stringer, had given her the paper that Sunday long ago at Yonkers, to read on the journey home. The paragraph described the up-to-date feature added to some important hotel. Small safes had been placed in the walls of rooms for the benefit of guests, each key being different in design from every other. Clo could not remember the name of the hotel referred to. Perhaps it was this one. If not, the Dietz wasn't likely to let a rival get ahead of it. The girl stared at the wall. Any one of those panels might conceal a safe! There were lots of panels of different sizes, painted a soft gray and edged with delicate white mouldings. To test each would take hours (unless she had luck and hit on the right one first) for there might be a spring hidden in the flowery pattern of the moulding. But—it was to the left side of the room that O'Reilly had flung his anxious glance. She would begin, and hoped to end, her work on the left side. A few minutes spent in thinking out the situation, however, might save many minutes by and by. About those panels, for instance? Which were the most likely to hide a secret?

A frieze or skirting-board of gray painted wood ran round the room to a height of three feet above the pink-carpeted floor. Above this frieze, distributed at regular intervals, were large plaster panels, two on each side of the room, forming backgrounds for gold-framed, coloured prints; and between these were small, narrow panels, ornamented with conventional flower designs. Beneath and above the latter were panels still smaller, placed horizontally, and outlined with white curlicues and flutings. They were about four inches in height by ten inches in length; and on the left side of the wall there were two.

"Just the right size for nice big jewel boxes," Clo thought. "And the lower one's just the right height to open without stretching up. If I were putting a safe into a wall that's the place I'd choose!"

She passed her finger round the edge of one, the white-fluted edge, rather like the decoration of a fancy cake. Nothing happened. No spring clicked. She tried the other with the same result, then stood disappointed, only to return to the attack with new inspiration.

"I bet it pulls out!" she told herself. And—oh, joy, oh triumph!—it did pull out as she pressed her sharp little nails under the white fluting. The whole thing came away from the wall like the loose side of a box, having been kept in place by thin prongs of metal. Behind this cover was a steel or iron door of practically the same dimensions as the panel. It also was painted gray, and showed a tiny keyhole like a slit made with a pair of sharp scissors.

Clo deposited the cover close by on the desk, where it would be within reach if wanted in a hurry. Then she inserted the key attached to O'Reilly's watch. It slipped into place. It turned. It opened the small iron door, and Clo peered into the aperture. In the receptacle lay a pile of greenbacks held together with a paper band. There was also an envelope, but not the envelope the girl had pictured. It was larger, longer, wider, and thicker. It seemed to be made of coarse linen, and instead of the dainty gold seals with the monogram there were five official-looking red ones. Clo's heart contracted. It seemed too bad to be true. But there was plenty of space in this envelope to contain the other, as well as its contents.

"I'll have to open the thing and look," Clo half decided. But if she did, how could she make sure of what she wished to know? If the envelope with the gold seals had been removed, she had no means of recognizing the documents it had contained.

She took the linen envelope from the safe, and turned it over. Upon the other side was an address, written in a strong, peculiar hand: "Justin O'Reilly, care of The Manager, Columbian Bank, New York City," she read.

There was just one reason to believe that the envelope contained Mrs. Sands' papers; Clo's own strong, instinctive conviction.

Tentatively she pressed one of the seals. It cracked across. Another went the same way, and as she touched the third there came a sound of talking outside the door. "Open it for me with your pass-key, please," a man said. It was O'Reilly's voice.

# XIII

## "THERE CAN BE NO BARGAIN"

When Beverley Sands had shut the door between Clodagh's room and Sister Lake's, she stood silent before Justin O'Reilly.

"Well, Mrs. Sands," he said, "I must congratulate you."

"On—what?" she stammered. She looked very young and humble, not at all the proud princess who had captured Roger Sands against his will.

O'Reilly answered, still smiling his cruel smile, "It's not too late for congratulations on your marriage, is it? By the way, perhaps one wishes well to the bride and congratulates the bridegroom! I mean nothing invidious."

"You mean to hurt me all you can!" Beverley cried.

"I'm on the other side, Mrs. Sands."

"Don't I know that!" she answered bitterly. "I've known since I saw you on board the Santa Fé Limited that day last September. I expected—some one else, not you. But I guessed in an instant why you had come."

"I accepted the obligations of friendship," O'Reilly deigned to explain. "And that brings us to one of the subjects for congratulation: your friend. A wonderful young person. I congratulate you highly upon her. She informed me that she'd gladly die for you. Judging from her looks, she isn't far from doing so. I'm sure you must want to go to her now. Oh, by the by, one more congratulation: the pearls."

"How did you know?" Beverley forgot her humiliation in sheer amazement.

"Weren't you told that Heron was trying to buy them for his wife?" O'Reilly waived her question with another.

"No, indeed! They were a surprise present to me this afternoon from my husband. If I'd known that Mr. Heron...."

"You don't expect me to believe you'd have sacrificed them to Heron, or his wife,

do you, Mrs. Sands?" O'Reilly laughed.

"I almost think I would. I'll give the pearls up to Mrs. Heron if you'll do as—as Clodagh Riley asked you to do. Oh, for pity's sake! I'd pay more than the pearls for those papers. I'd pay with my life if that would be of any use. I know it wouldn't. But the pearls—can't we bargain with the pearls?"

"We can't bargain at all, Mrs. Sands," O'Reilly said gravely. "I must go. I have an engagement to dine with the Herons. I should like to hear how my namesake is, and then I will be off."

Beverley had expected little from an appeal to this man's pity, but the coincidence of Heron's desire for the pearls was so strange that it ought to mean something. It seemed terrible that such a chance should be wasted. Could she persuade Roger to let her give up the pearls? O'Reilly would look at the wonderful things and report upon their beauty. The Herons might be tempted to treat with her. In any case, the scheme was worth the trial.

Silently she went to the door that she had closed, and peeped into Sister Lake's room. It was no surprise to her that Clodagh should have vanished. That was part of the plan. Her exclamation was for O'Reilly's benefit.

"The child's gone!" she cried. "That means she's feeling better. She must be in my room—or in my boudoir. Will you come with me? We'll look for her. It will be on your way out."

O'Reilly followed into the hall. Beverley, thinking quickly, went to the door of her own special sitting room, which adjoined her bedroom. A backward glance told her that the man had stopped facing the vestibule which gave exit from the flat. "Wait one moment," she said. "I'll see where Clodagh is." As she touched the door of the boudoir she was surprised to find it yielding before she turned the handle. This was odd, because she remembered shutting it the last time she came out. She had left the room only at the moment when O'Reilly brought in the half-fainting girl; and she had been particular to close the door because of the pearls. She had placed them on a table in the boudoir, ready for the pearl-stringer. Not that she feared their being stolen! Her own maid had been sent out for the afternoon. Two of the other servants had been given a holiday. Only the butler, the cook, and his assistant were at home, and all three had been in Roger's employ for years. They were above suspicion, and besides, they knew nothing of the pearls. Not a soul knew, save herself, Roger, Clo, and now O'Reilly. Roger had started off in his car before she brought the pearls from her bedroom into the

boudoir. Who, then, had opened the door? Perhaps, after all, Clo had not dared attempt the second adventure. Perhaps she was still in the flat, and for some reason to be explained later, had taken refuge in the boudoir?

A glance, however, showed that the girl was not there. The electric light flashed upon a room untenanted. There was the magnificent but broken rope in its case, wound in gleaming, concentric circles, the unstrung pearls retrieved from the floor grouped together on the purple cushion. The door stood open between boudoir and bedroom. Beverley thought that this had been shut also, though she was not sure. "Clo!" she called softly. There was some slight sound, or she imagined it. Quickly she went to the bedroom door, and peeped in, flooding the place with light. Clo was not to be seen. Turning off the electricity again Beverley went out to O'Reilly in the hall.

"Come with me one moment," she said. "I've something to show you."

O'Reilly hesitated.

"Is your friend there? Does she wish to speak to me?" he asked.

"Come and see," Beverley persisted. She led the way into the boudoir, and reluctantly her companion crossed the threshold. Mrs. Sands pointed to the pearls. "I wanted so much to show them to you. See how wonderful they are! Mr. Heron's so proud of his wife. I could arrange some plan, I'm sure, if—if ——"

A door slammed, and Beverley's sentence broke off with a gasp. Mechanically she shut down the cover of the velvet case. If Roger had come back; if, after all, he had only pretended to go for the pearl-stringer! She dared not guess what he would think at finding O'Reilly with her in his house. Too well she remembered the day of their one quarrel, when he had brought up this man's name in connection with Clo's, when he had accused her of crying it out in her sleep.

"Mr. O'Reilly," she said, very quietly, "that may be my husband coming home. If it is, you will have to meet him. It can't be avoided. But I should like to speak to him first, if you will wait in this room for a moment."

Without giving him time to answer she ran out. Minutes passed. Justin heard voices, women's voices. One, it seemed to him, was raised in anger. After all, it couldn't be Sands who had come! O'Reilly grew impatient, and fumbling for his watch he found it gone. Great Scott! Stolen! He remembered a certain small key

attached to the chain. In a flash of enlightenment the whole plot mapped itself out before his eyes. Furious, his impulse was to dash from the room and denounce the chief culprit. But Beverley Sands' appeal to his chivalry stopped him like a chain round his feet.

Now she called his name, and he opened the door.

"It was my friend's nurse who came in," she said. "She threatens to leave at once. I must talk with her, try to soothe her down before my husband comes. He hasn't arrived, after all—and may not for a long time. But the way I felt when I thought he was here, shows me I oughtn't to keep you. Tell me once and for all before you go, now you've seen the pearls; is there any hope?"

"None whatever," O'Reilly cut her short. "I'm going, Mrs. Sands. You need have no fear of me where your husband's concerned, though I understand now exactly why I was brought here, why I was kept till you were afraid to keep me longer. Your little friend is as smart at picking pockets as she is at acting. Again, I congratulate you upon her. But the effort's going to be wasted. Good-night."

Beverley stood still, and let him go. She had no answer to make. Precisely what he meant by his accusation she did not understand, but she knew that, while she detained him, Clo had indeed dared the great adventure. For a moment Beverley thought of the pearls almost with distaste. That they should come to her to-day, when she cared for nothing in the world but the lost papers, was an irony of fate. She did not return to the boudoir. She forgot the mystery of the open door, and neglected to close it. She was nervously anxious to excuse herself to Sister Lake. Above all, it was her duty to defend Clo. She must confess that it was upon her errand the girl had defied authority.

"Please don't blame the child," she pleaded. "She knew I needed something done for me—a thing I couldn't do myself. So she made this sacrifice. You must forgive us both."

But Sister Lake was not to be placated. If Miss Riley were well enough to do Mrs. Sands' errands by day and night, a nurse's services were no longer needed. Sister Lake considered herself well paid, and would accept no present in addition. The butler was summoned to call a taxi and attend to sending down the small luggage. Meantime the Queen's pearls were forgotten.

# XIV

## THE STONE COPING

This was bad luck! Clo had not expected O'Reilly to track her down so soon. But he was at the door. There was only that frail barrier of wood, and the space of a few seconds between them! He had discovered the loss of his door key, and doubtless the other loss as well. He had guessed who was the thief, and what was the thief's motive. He had hurried home. A moment more—just the little delay of fitting in a pass key—and he would catch the culprit red-handed; he would deprive her of the spoils!

Clear as a "cut in" from some moving picture, a scene rose before Clodagh's eyes. She saw herself at grips with O'Reilly. She saw him wrench the envelope from her hands as she resisted. She saw herself sobbing over her failure and Angel's lost hopes. That picture mustn't come true! The key attached to the watch-chain, she had removed from the safe door, and had laid watch and all on a buffet. Beside them she had placed the door key. Now, as the chambermaid chattered in the corridor, and O'Reilly made light of his loss, Clodagh moved faster than any figure in a moving picture. She snatched up everything on the buffet, pushed all into the safe, softly shut the steel door, concealed it with the panel which slipped readily into its groove, and fled into the adjoining bedroom.

Lights from across a court showed that the sole doors were those of a bath and a clothes-closet. There was no way out from the bedroom. Entrance and exit to the suite were to be had only through the sitting room.

"I might have known," Clo reflected. Too late she recalled that through the nearest door had appeared the couple in evening dress. She was caught like a mouse in a trap (poor mouse, who had meant to gnaw the encircling net!) caught unless—unless! Her heart gave a leap as she saw the one way out.

The night was warm, and the window had been opened wide to let in the blue dusk. Light from opposite windows giving on the court shone upon a stone coping. It was broad, as copings go, broad enough for some white roses dropped from a window above to lodge without falling farther. It was this conspicuous splash of white on the dark stone which put into Clo's mind the word "unless."

The chambermaid was rattling her pass key in the lock. If the thing were to be done, it must be done now! Yes, that stone coping ran all the way along under O'Reilly's window as well as those opposite. It was quite fourteen or fifteen inches in width, Clo thought, and was placed twice as many inches below the window sill. It would be easy to step down on to the ledge; and only a short distance away was the window of the next room, a room in the suite occupied by the couple she had seen. That window was open, like O'Reilly's. Clo could be sure of this, because the lace curtains were blowing out in the draught from some other window. They were of thick lace covered with embroidery, and if one could catch hold of a curtain as it blew the stuff wouldn't tear. As for the stolen envelope, it was safe in one of those odd, new-fashioned pockets of hers. Hastily she made it more secure with a big pin, by which she fastened it to the cloth of her dress. Thus both hands were free. But it took courage to start!

"Oh, I must, I must do it!" she thought, her body ice, her soul aflame. "It's for Angel! If I don't look down, I shall be all right. And even if I fall and smash like an egg I'll be no worse off than before she saved me. I'll be back just where I was that day."

Uninvited, the chambermaid had followed O'Reilly into the next room. She was talking volubly, hoping that he'd mislaid the door key, that it hadn't been stolen. Clo, in making her dash for the bedroom, had quietly closed the door between, but she could hear that the two were talking.

Anyhow, the girl tried to think, it was the first step that cost! Once outside the bedroom window, plastered against the wall, the danger of being caught was over. O'Reilly would search the clothes-closet, and peer into the bath. Then he would suppose that the bird was already flown. Never would he dream that a girl would dare what she meant to dare.

Oddly enough, that reflection decided Clo to act. For the moment, fear left her free. She stepped briskly over the window sill with one foot, and landed on the ledge. It felt solid, almost comforting; but as she groped for it with the other foot, horror caught her again, poured through her veins like iced water and made her heart feel a dead thing. She tried not to think of anything except that kind curtain flapping in the wind. She clung to the window-frame with fingers so damp that they slipped on the stone. Holding on for dear life—yes, life was dear, now it hung by a thread!—she edged along, her cheek scraping the wall as she moved. One step, two, three—another would take her so far that she must let go of the window frame. Could she reach the blowing curtain? A few moments ago

it had seemed to beckon. Now she depended on it the white folds eluded her hand. If the wind dropped, she was lost. She couldn't help thinking of all the things she wished not to think of. She thought of that immense depth below her narrow perch. She didn't believe the man or woman lived strong-minded enough to forget it!

As she reached out with her free arm for the curtain, a light sprang up from the room she had left. O'Reilly was there, searching for her. It had been simple to say, while she stood on a solid floor, that he would not look out of the window. But he might look out: he might hear her feet shuffling along the ledge. If his head appeared now, she would fall.

The girl began to shake all over like a winter leaf on a high branch. She would have to go, she thought. But the curtain was blowing very near, so near that she ventured another step. The lace brushed her fingers. With a last effort she grasped a fold. Courage came back. Now she had let go of O'Reilly's window frame. She had passed on beyond hope of return, and yet she had no firm grasp upon the curtain. Before it could give the support a rope gives a climber, she must slowly, patiently, draw it toward her inch by inch until she had it taut.

"Angel, are you praying for me?" she wondered. Because she could not pray for herself. She could only count. Dimly, she felt it odd that it should calm her nerves to count each time her fingers closed upon the curtain. But it did calm them.

"Seven, eight, nine, ten." The fold of lace began to be taut. Drawing it toward her, she started on once more on that endless journey of a few inches. Thank heaven, the light in O'Reilly's bedroom had been switched off. The man must have given up the chase, and gone back to the sitting room. For the present she was safe from him. But what a queer word "safe" was, just then. "Eleven, twelve, thirteen." Thanks to the curtain rope, she had almost reached her goal. "Fourteen, fifteen." She had got so far that she could let the curtain go and fling her arms over the window sill. She threw her body upon it, and lay still for an instant, utterly spent now the strain was over. But was it over? No, not yet. If her feet slipped from the coping, she would have no strength for the effort of climbing in at the window. She would hang for a minute and then—drop.

"The papers," she reminded herself, for a mental tonic. "They're so nearly safe now. Brace up, Clo! A minute more and you'll be out of trouble."

The room beyond was, like O'Reilly's, unlighted. Thank goodness, there'd be no

squalling lady's maid to give an alarm. Clo allowed herself time to breathe, resting on the window sill. Then she prepared to draw herself over. Wrapping the curtain round her right hand, and clutching the lace firmly with her left hand, she found a heavy piece of furniture just inside the window. It seemed to be a dressing-table with a mirror suspended between two spiral posts. Grasping one, Clo pulled the table closer, till it refused to move. This gave a lever on which she might depend. She clung to the curtain and post, till she could plant first one knee, then its fellow, on the window sill. It seemed an easy thing to do, and would have been easy had not her strength been nearly spent. Her quivering muscles responded slowly to this last call, but they did respond. Soon she was kneeling on the window sill. Then one foot was over, groping for the floor. She had just found it when a key grated in a lock, and before she could hide behind the curtains a door opened wide. A flood of light streamed in from the corridor, and outlined her white form against the blue background of the night.

# XV

## THE NUMBER SEVENTEEN

To go back meant death, and the loss of Beverley's papers. Besides, she had been seen. For once, Clo's wits refused to work. Like a frozen flower, she remained motionless in the window.

The figure in the doorway was that of a man. The light coming from behind made his face a blank for her eyes, but the girl saw that he was taller than O'Reilly and of a different build. Perhaps it was the owner of the suite, he who had gone out with the beautiful woman. The man made no move. He stood in the doorway as if rooted to the floor. "My God!" Clo heard him mutter.

"The fool takes me for a ghost," she thought. "Now's my chance, before he plucks up courage!"

Down came the other white shoe on the carpet with no more noise than a rose-petal falling. Then followed a second of indecision. Should she risk pushing the man aside, and fleeing past him into the hall? No, her touch would break the spell. She must go on with the ghost-play, and vanish in the dark!

Light from outside showed her the open door of an adjoining room. Thence came the draught which had set the curtains blowing. Clo took a few floating steps toward the man, then dodged aside, and disappeared into the room beyond. Softly she closed the communicating door and slid the bolt. Almost opposite where she stood opened a cross passage leading to a wing of the hotel. With a bound she reached it, not daring to look behind, yet listening with the ear of the hunted for the hunter, as she ran. Coming to a staircase the girl plunged down it two steps at a time. On the floor below, however, she ventured to moderate her pace. This was the dinner hour; most of the guests would be in the restaurant, or out of the hotel for the evening; but there would be servants about. Clo forced herself to descend sedately, flight after flight of stairs, not daring to enter a lift. At last, when it seemed that she had come to earth from the top of Jacob's ladder, the stairway ended. Timidly following a passage that opened before her, she ventured into a wide, important hall.

There was a cloakroom in the hall. Ladies were going into it and coming out.

Clo heard music in the distance and saw a marble balustrade. This balustrade was for her a landmark. She knew by it that she must have reached the story above the ground floor, and that the large corridor of the cloakroom opened on to a gallery overlooking the main hall. She had glanced up and admired that marble balustrade when she first entered the hotel. She had seen also a wide marble staircase leading up to the gallery. It must be near, she thought, but it was a way of exit to avoid. If O'Reilly were on guard below, or even if he had merely telephoned her description to the office, she and the stolen envelope would be promptly nabbed in the hall below. She had dared too much to be tamely taken now. Mirrors were let into the panels of the wall, and Clo paused before one, pretending to straighten her hat. She wanted time to make up her mind.

The ladies who left their wraps in this upstairs cloakroom must be dining in private rooms on the same floor, she thought. "Out there in the gallery their men will be waiting for them," the girl told herself. "And maybe that's where my man is waiting for me!"

One of these ladies, opening a gold chain bag to pull out her handkerchief, dropped a bit of paper with a number on it—Clo's favourite number, 17. It fluttered close to her feet; she stooped and picked it up. Common sense told her that the numbered slip was a cloakroom check. It might mean salvation. She walked leisurely into the cloakroom, though her nerves were a-jerk like the strings of a jumping-jack. "My cousin has asked me to come and fetch her wrap," she explained to a bored attendant. "There's a draught through the dining room. This is her check."

The woman accepted it without a word. She presently produced a long wrap of black chiffon, lined with blue. "Number seventeen. Here you are, miss." So speaking, she removed the duplicate check, which had been pinned to a frilled hood of the cloak. At sight of that hood a weight lifted from Clo's heart. It was more ornamental than practical, but it would be immensely useful to her. If she had been given her choice of cloaks, she couldn't have done better. Seventeen was bringing her luck.

"Oh, I believe I'd better leave my hat!" she said to the attendant, as if on a second thought. Unsuspiciously the woman took it, pinned a bit of paper to the lining, and handed the duplicate to Clo. "Nobody's got seventeen now, so I'll give it to you again." This seemed a good omen: seventeen for the second time! With the cloak over her arm she sauntered out of the room. Then back she went to the foot of the stairs, where was a quiet niche behind a big, potted palm, and

close by was one of those convenient panel mirrors. Thus refuged, Clo slipped into the wrap, and arranged the floppy hood. It was far from becoming, for the frill fell almost to her eyes; but it hid the tell-tale red hair, and showed little of her face save the end of an impudent nose and the tip of a pointed chin. The cloak, made for a taller figure than Clo's, came nearly to her feet, and holding it together the white dress became invisible.

"Now for it!" she thought, like a soldier who goes "over the top" to charge the enemy. Head down, hood flapping, cloak floating, she sailed along the corridor and out into the gallery beyond. Yes, there was the marble staircase, and below was the great, bright hall; but in this disguise she could pass O'Reilly if he had assembled half the detectives in New York. So she tripped down the stairs, sedate, unhurried as the care-free girl whose cloak she had borrowed. Arrived in the hall, she knew her way out, and could hardly subdue the triumph in her voice as she said "Taxi, please," to an attendant porter.

"Where shall I tell him to go, miss?" came the question as she stepped into the cab; and for half a second she hesitated. By a clock she had seen in the hall it was just half-past eight. There would be time to go home, time for Angel to open the envelope and see if the contents were right, time to tell Angel her own adventures, and time to rest before keeping her tryst with Peterson.

She gave the number of the house in Park Avenue where Roger Sands lived. The door of the taxi shut with a reassuring "click." It was heavenly to lean back against the comfortable cushions! She ought to be entirely happy, entirely satisfied. Perhaps it was only reaction after so many hopes and fears, this weight that seemed to press upon her heart. Yet it was an obstinate weight. It grew heavier as the taxi brought her nearer home.

# XVI

## A QUOTATION FROM SHAKESPEARE

"Not easily jealous, but, being wrought,
Perplexed in the extreme."

The words describing Othello's torment rang in Roger Sands' ears.

The words kept time with the purring throb of the motor that sped him on his wife's errand. Certain it was that he had not been easily jealous!

He had married a girl with a secret to keep, and he had never questioned her. He had made her a queen; and he was her loyal subject. She ruled him and his kingdom. Only to-day he had given her a queen's pearls. They were his atonement for an hour of distrust. How had she rewarded him? Roger reviewed the afternoon, since the presentation of the pearls, and there were details which he saw in a new light. So desperate had been her mysterious haste that she had broken the rope of pearls, and had not even stopped to pick up the scattered splendour.

Roger Sands' heart had been hard toward his wife when they met. He had settled upon a policy of silence for the present, while in self-protection he watched developments. He agreed quietly to Beverley's request that he should fetch the pearl-stringer, though feeling a cold, sick certainty of her motive in making it.

He went, as he had given his word that he would go, to 27 Elm Street, Yonkers. Miss Blackburne herself answered his ring: and when the name of Clo Riley was mentioned, she said at once that she would accompany Mr. Sands. Roger was kept waiting only while Miss Blackburne took leave of her mother, gathered together her materials, and packed a small bag; for it was clear that, if the pearl-stringer were to finish her work in one sitting, she would have to spend the night in Park Avenue.

The little woman, whose face seemed almost featureless to Roger Sands, was interested in the man as well as in the mission. The pearl-stringer had often heard of him in various ways; and her work took her into a set who knew, or gossiped, about his private affairs. She had listened to women's talk concerning Mrs. Sands, "the girl from nowhere," and, though Miss Blackburne was "good as gold," she did enjoy a little spicy scandal. She could in future make herself quite interesting to some of her regular clients by telling how she had worked for Mrs. Roger Sands; and not only for their sakes, but her own, did she look forward to this "job."

Secretly, Ellen Blackburne planned some day to write a volume of reminiscences, and she had a "feeling," as she sat in discreet silence beside Roger Sands in his car, that to-night she would get material for particularly good notes. She was conscious that his nerves were tensely strung. "It's just as if he were sitting in a thunder cloud charged full of electricity, with me getting some of the shocks," she told herself, thinking of her notebook, where she would make entries when she got home.

It was nearly a quarter past eight when Roger's latch-key opened the door of his apartment. Miss Blackburne was impressed, not only by the magnificence of the hall, but by the originality of its decoration.

Roger, having let himself and the pearl-stringer in with his latch-key, regretted that he had done so. He did not want to see Beverley alone just then. It would be better to have her summoned by a servant. Miss Blackburne was too observant of tiny details not to notice that he stepped back and pushed the electric bell outside the door, which he had not yet closed. And when he said to the butler: "Please tell Mrs. Sands that I have been able to bring back Miss Blackburne," the small student of character guessed at once that he wished to avoid meeting his wife.

The hall was large, and furnished like an extra drawing-room, therefore it was not inhospitable that Roger should leave the pearl-stringer alone there, with the excuse that he must dress for dinner. He was, he explained, going to his club. As he made this announcement, however, and before the butler could carry the message to Mrs. Sands, a dazzling vision appeared. It could be no other, Miss Blackburne felt, than Mrs. Sands herself; and she was right, for Beverley had dressed with unusual speed, yet with unwonted pains, in order to be ready for Roger's return.

The vision came into the hall before the butler had been able to deliver the message, and his wife's arrival whilst the man was present gave Roger an opportunity he would not miss. There was a question he wished to ask the old servant, in Beverley's hearing, but he had not expected the chance to come so soon. The butler retreated, stepping aside respectfully to let Mrs. Sands pass. But before the man could efface himself, and before greeting Beverley, Roger exclaimed, "Oh, by the by, Johnson, has any one been here since I went out?"

"Yes, sir," the butler replied, "one gentleman has been. He——"

But the vision intervened. "The gentleman wasn't a visitor, Johnson," she said, a

sharp note in her voice, almost an agonized note. "You ought to explain to Mr. Sands that he came only to bring Miss Riley home." Then she hurried on, snatching the explanation from the servant's mouth, though she had ordered him to make it: "The poor child came back quite done up, nearly fainting. She had to be helped in, almost carried. The man stayed just long enough to hear that she was better. Is it Miss Blackburne you've been lucky enough to find, and bring back to me?"

All this rushed out in a breath. The lovely lady in white and silver smiled at the small person in brown pongee. But Roger Sands was not a man easy to play with.

"Yes, it is Miss Blackburne," he quietly answered. "What was the gentleman's name, Johnson? Did you hear it?"

There was a trifling pause while the servant replied. Mrs. Sands was still faintly smiling, a mechanical smile, and her eyes were suddenly dull as glass.

"Yes, sir, I believe I heard the name mentioned," Johnson admitted. "I thought it was the same as the young lady's; Riley or O'Riley. As Mrs. Sands remarks, sir, he wasn't exactly calling, so the name wasn't announced. It only reached my ears."

Roger looked straight at Beverley. The gaze was a challenge. "Was it Justin O'Reilly who came?" he inquired; and his eyes said: "if your conscience is clean, you'll understand that I'm not trying to extract any confession. I give you the chance to clear yourself, here and now, that's all."

But Beverley's face was flooded with one of her painful blushes, that always came when she wanted them least. She realized, too late, that Roger had enquired of Johnson because he suspected, perhaps even knew, that O'Reilly had been in the house.

"Yes, it was Justin O'Reilly who came and stopped about ten minutes," she answered, trying to keep her voice as calm as Roger's. "But this isn't very interesting to Miss Blackburne. It was good of her to give up her Sunday evening! Shall we——"

"Just a moment, please," Roger broke in, still in that deadly quiet voice which, it seemed, could betray nothing to a stranger, but for Beverley was a knife at her heart. "I must go out presently. Before starting to dress I should like to hear the

latest news about your protégée. She looked all right, and not inclined to faint, when I saw her tripping into the house, just before I came in from my walk some time ago. By the by I think Mr. O'Reilly must have been with her then. He was passing the house, I noticed."

"I don't know anything about that," the answer came slowly. "Clo didn't mention seeing Mr. O'Reilly at that time. She rested and went out again later. Johnson was speaking of her *second* return."

Beverley knew that her husband could easily have questioned Johnson behind her back, and then have entrapped her perhaps, through her ignorance of what had passed. He had chosen instead, to be as frank as he was hard; and while she suffered, Beverley thanked her husband for cold justice.

"I must dress now," Roger said heavily. "I am dining at my club."

Murmuring some civility to Miss Blackburne, Sands turned away. A moment more, and his wife heard his bedroom door shut. At the sound it seemed that her heart must die in her breast! She felt a sensation of physical sickness, and would have given anything not to have the pearl-stringer on her hands. Here the woman was, however, and could not be treated with discourtesy!

"You will dine with me, of course, before beginning your work," Beverley said, trying to be cordial. But Miss Blackburne smiled and shook her head. She had had "high tea" at home with her mother, and could eat nothing more, she replied, thanking Mrs. Sands.

"I'll take you to my boudoir," Beverley said kindly to the little woman in brown. "The pearls are there. You'll be surprised at their beauty."

Miss Blackburne let her hostess lead the way. "There's a drama here, all right!" she told herself. "Has it anything to do with the pearls? But I shall know soon, I bet!"

The Vision opened the door of a charming room. The light was already switched on, and the new-comer noticed that a door stood wide open between the boudoir and the bedroom, which, also, was lighted. Miss Blackburne guessed that Mrs. Sands had only just finished dressing in a hurry as her husband came into the house. Perhaps, on account of the pearls, her maid had been released from duty. Anyhow, someone had forgotten to turn off the lights, and ... but Mrs. Sands herself was explaining.

"I left the door open between my room and this while I dressed," she said, "because of what you see on this table. I thought it might as well be here, as anywhere else, all ready and waiting for you."

She made a nervous gesture, and Miss Blackburne saw on the table indicated a large oval case of purple velvet, slightly old-fashioned looking, and adorned with a splendid gold crown. The pearl-stringer knew something about crowns and coronets: duchesses, countesses, baronesses, and small fry like that. But this crown was royal. She was going to get good "copy" for her notes!

Beverley's hand moved toward the purple case. She was in a desperate hurry to get her business with Miss Blackburne over, and escape into the hall again. She must try to have a word with Roger before he went, though she dared not—literally dared not—go to his room.

"You'll see the pearls, and——" she had begun, when her ears caught the sound of an electric bell; a loud, insistent peal.

# XVII

## THE MYSTERY OF THE BOUDOIR

"It's Roger," Beverley thought. "He's ringing for Johnson—perhaps to ask more questions!"

"I must speak to my husband," she said to Miss Blackburne. "The pearls are in that case. There are two hundred and fifty. About thirty came unstrung. You'll see for yourself how they ought to be graduated. I'll be with you again in a few minutes."

She flew to the hall, hoping to intercept Johnson before he could reach Roger's room. But the man was not on his way there. It was the sound of the door-bell she had heard. Johnson was in the act of admitting a girl in a black chiffon cloak lined with blue. A large frilled hood pulled over the wearer's eyes hid the profile from Beverley. The girl turned; it was Clo.

"I'll go with you to your room," Beverley said, controlling her voice for the benefit of Johnson, and trying not to show how frantic was her haste. It was only when she had noiselessly closed the door of the big, bare room, that she dared let herself go.

"What's happened?" she implored. "Why are you dressed like this? Of course you haven't got the papers?"

"I dressed like this to make a get-away," said Clo. "I stole the cloak. I'll tell you everything by and by. But first, you must find out for yourself whether I've got the papers. I've got something—something in a thick envelope. That's all I know."

She threw off the cloak of the girl at the Dietz, and unpinned the pocket which held the precious package—the pocket which, thanks to the pin, had guarded its contents through the whole series of her adventures.

Beverley took the large linen envelope, not even thanking Clo. Neither noticed the omission.

"Addressed to Justin O'Reilly!" she exclaimed. "It's the right size. But what

makes you think it may have my envelope inside?"

"Because it was carefully hidden in a safe in the wall. I thought of opening it to make sure. There wasn't—enough time."

"I'll open it ... now!" said Beverley. Her words were firm, yet she hesitated, and turning, the envelope over, stared at the five official-looking red seals. What if it should contain legal documents belonging to some client of O'Reilly's?

"Tap—tap!" came at the door.

Beverley laid the envelope on the glass table, where Clo's medicine bottles once had stood. Over the red seals she flung her handkerchief, lest it should be Roger at the door.

Meanwhile, Clo had answered the knock and revealed Johnson.

"Madam, the lady who came with Mr. Sands wishes to see you immediately; it's very urgent," he announced.

"Say I'll be there in a few minutes," she replied. "I can't come just yet."

Johnson departed. "Madam will come in a few minutes," he repeated to Miss Blackburne, who had been anxiously awaiting him at a half-open door. "I think," he added, "she is busy, miss."

"In that case," suggested the pearl-stringer, "perhaps you'd better call Mr. Sands."

"Very well, miss, I'll do so." Johnson turned away, and Miss Blackburne retreated to the boudoir.

But it occurred to Clo that Roger might be summoned if Beverley delayed.

"Something must be worrying Miss Blackburne," she said. "I wonder if it's anything you'd like Mr. Sands to mix up in, or if you'd rather attend to it yourself? You know, we've lots of time before ten o'clock. If the papers are in this envelope, it's all right. If not, there's nothing doing."

Just why Beverley did not want Roger to go to her boudoir she hardly knew, unless she feared that a pearl might be missing, and that Roger would be more vexed than he was already. Whatever the motive in her mind, she felt suddenly impelled to haste. Even with Clo she could not leave the envelope. Wrapping it

in the handkerchief to hide the address, she hurried off with it in her hand.

"You sent for me, Miss Blackburne?" she asked, as she threw open the door.

The pearl-stringer stood by the table, looking pale and strange.

"Oh, Mrs. Sands," she exclaimed, "you told me the pearls were in their case, but they're not. I found it empty. You must have laid them somewhere else."

Beverley wondered whether she had become temporarily insane, and had hidden the pearls in a place already forgotten. But in her heart she knew that nothing of the sort had happened.

"No," she said, answering herself as well as Miss Blackburne, "I didn't touch the pearls after I put them away, and brought them in here. Oh, please don't tease me! This is too serious!"

"Tease you!" echoed Miss Blackburne. "Why, Mrs. Sands, I wouldn't do such a thing! I wish to goodness I'd insisted on your staying till I'd opened the case and counted the pearls. I don't think I was ever so foolish before! Now, maybe you'll believe that I've sto——"

"No—no!" exclaimed Beverley, calmed by the other's distress. "Of course I believe nothing so foolish. Even if you—what nonsense to speak of it!—but even if you wanted the pearls, you couldn't hide them. Let me think! Let me go back in my mind over everything that happened. I was in the next room practically all the time when I wasn't here. The door was open between. I could have seen any one who came in. Oh, the pearls can't have been stolen. There's been nobody to steal them."

"What about our little friend, Clo Riley?" Miss Blackburne asked. "Could she possibly know anything? Mightn't she help with some suggestion? I thought hers one of the brightest, quickest minds I ever met. Indeed, I owe my life to its quickness."

Beverley forgot to answer. The pearl-stringer's words had sent her thoughts travelling along a new path. Suddenly she became aware that she had deceived Miss Blackburne and herself. When she made that statement, she had not reflected. Clo's return, in O'Reilly's company, now seemed so long ago that she had not cast her mind back so far in connection with the pearls. She had thought of what she had done since O'Reilly's refusal of her request, and his departure. She had pictured herself as having seen the pearls in their case since then. But

she had not done so. She had seen only the closed case, and had naturally taken it for granted that the pearls were in it. As a matter of fact, she had not actually seen them since she herself closed the velvet case. Could Clo possibly have dashed into the boudoir and hidden the pearls?

"I'll speak to Clo," she finally replied, with a dazed look after a silence that puzzled Miss Blackburne.

"Please stay here. I'll be back in three or four minutes, and bring Clo with me, if she's well enough."

Clo, denuded of the stolen cloak, had flung herself upon the bed to rest, and call back the force of her vitality for a later effort. Her nerves were throbbing like hot wires, and she jumped at the opening of the door.

"Oh, I'm glad it's you!" she sighed, at sight of Beverley. "Have you opened the envelope?"

"The envelope!" Beverley repeated. "Oh, Clo, I thought nothing on earth could have put it out of my head for a second. But Miss Blackburne called me to say the pearls have disappeared. I forgot the envelope. I must hurry back. Did you do anything with the pearls, on your way out?"

Clo looked aghast. "Good gracious, no!" she cried. "I went through the kitchen, and down the servants' elevator. Oh, Mrs. Sands—Angel—you don't think——"

"Nonsense! You're as bad as Miss Blackburne!" Beverley cut her short. "I thought that, for some reason, you might have hidden them. Now I know you didn't. Clo, this is the most terrible day—except one—in my life. I must find the pearls or Roger will never forgive me. And only a few minutes ago they were nothing, compared with the papers!"

Clo's wits, drowned in horror for an instant, came to the surface again. "What if O'Reilly took the pearls for revenge!" she blurted out. "Did he know—was he anywhere near them?"

Beverley, who had been standing by the bed, sank down upon it, and stared. "He did know," she said slowly. "And—and he was alone in the room with the pearls for some minutes if I remember rightly. You see, Sister Lake arrived. She was angry about your being out. I tried to soothe her. It was no use. She left, bag and baggage, in injured dignity. O'Reilly was in my boudoir. Oh, Clo, it must be he who took the pearls!"

The girl herself had said it: yet, when the words were repeated by other lips than hers, it gave her a shock. O'Reilly's face rose before her eyes. "I don't believe he did it!" she was surprised to hear her own voice cry out aloud.

"You suggested it yourself!" exclaimed Beverley.

"I know," the girl confessed. "The idea popped into my head. But it can't be true. He's not that sort, whatever else he may be!"

"He went off furious with you, with us both," Beverley said. "It must have been he who stole the pearls. There's a strong motive—something for him to hold over us, and force us to give the papers back."

"If we've got them!" cut in Clo.

Beverley sprang up. "I'm lost in this!" she faltered. "There are too many things against me. I can't cope with them all at once. I must go to the boudoir and get that envelope, whatever happens."

"What shall I do?" asked Clo.

Beverley was already at the door, and had opened it.

"If I don't come back to you in five minutes, it will be a sign I want you to come to me."

When the door had shut behind her Angel, the girl felt she would be thankful for the five minutes' respite. She lay flat and straight as a figure on a marble tomb, yet she could not rest for thinking of O'Reilly. His eyes seemed to be looking into hers. By shutting them, she could not shut him out. When she thought that the five minutes must have passed, she slid wearily off the bed.

"I must go to Angel," she said half aloud. But she had not got to her feet when, without knocking, Beverley flung the door open.

Instantly Clo guessed that some new and worse misfortune had happened.

"This time it's the end. I give up!" Beverley panted. "The envelope has gone with the pearls. I hadn't even opened it. I don't know what was inside."

"Gone! The envelope gone!" gasped the girl. "Gone—from—where?"

"From the table in the boudoir," Beverley answered. "I laid it there when Miss Blackburne told me about the pearls. It was there when I came to you. Miss

Blackburne hasn't left the room. She didn't even see the envelope. I've searched everywhere for it—but it's gone."

# XVIII

## DEFEAT

All Clo's efforts and schemings wasted! She had tricked, stolen, risked her life, in vain. The envelope was gone.

"You can't have looked everywhere," she insisted. "The thing must have got tucked out of sight—unless Miss Blackburne ... but no, she's as good as gold!"

"I'm sure you're right about her. She is good," said Beverley. "But ... she says nobody came into the room while she was there.... I asked her. Otherwise I might have thought that Rog——" The sentence broke. "I wanted to see you alone," Angel began again, "so I came back. You've been so wonderful to-day, you've made me depend upon you. If there were anything to do, you'd be the one to do it. But there's nothing ... is there? I can't see any light, can you?"

"Let me help you to look for the envelope," said Clo.

"Come, then," said the other, in a toneless voice, unlike her own. Together they went to Beverley's boudoir, where there was a little interlude of greetings between Clo and Miss Blackburne. Then, Clo was beginning her search for the lost envelope when Roger Sands slowly passed the half-open door. Beverley had left it ajar, not because she wished to call him (that desire had fled with the news about the pearls), but in order to see that he went out. She stood with her back to the door at the moment, but on the wall directly opposite hung a long mirror. Clo guessed, by the slight start Angel gave, that she must have caught sight of his reflection. He turned and came back.

"If he asks to see the pearls!" was the thought in Clo's head. Her eyes met Beverley's and read the same terror there.

Roger spoke to Miss Blackburne, pausing on the threshold.

"What do you think of the baubles?" he asked with elaborate carelessness. "Are they above the average?"

The two girls held their breath. Would the pearl-stringer give the situation away?

But Miss Blackburne, true to herself, was discretion incarnate.

"I've not seen enough of the pearls, yet, to form an opinion," she replied, "but my impression is that they must be altogether exceptional."

"I'm glad your impression is good," said Roger. He turned to his wife. "I may not be back till late. Don't sit up for me. Good-night."

Beverley followed him into the hall.

"Roger!" she pleaded. "You're doing me a most horrible injustice. I can't bear it!"

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"You can't help knowing," she said, "It's about Justin O'Reilly. You think I——"

"Have I accused you of anything?" he challenged, brows raised, eyes blank.

"No. But——"

"Your imagination seems to be even more lively than your conscience is sensitive, my dear girl. What have you done, that I should accuse you?"

"I've done nothing, Roger, that you——"

"All right, then. Why borrow trouble? I must hurry, or I'll miss my appointment. Good-night again. Sleep well!"

Roger left her without a backward glance. Beverley felt that she was caught in the folds of a vast net.

What was it Clo had said, that day? "There was once a mouse who gnawed a net ——" Poor mouse, it had tried to-day to gnaw the net! It had gnawed one small hole, but even before the prisoner could struggle to get free, the hole had closed again. Still, the mouse was ready for another bout. It was a brave, bold mouse—a subtle mouse! For some strange reason her sole hope was in Clo.

During her absence the girl had searched the boudoir from end to end. Her sharp eyes had not missed a cranny big enough to hide a pin, to say nothing of a rope of pearls or a large envelope with five red seals. Both the pearls and the envelope must have been stolen. Were there two thieves, or only one?

With Roger's departure, and Beverley's return, the three women could talk with freedom, especially after Mrs. Sands' announcement to the butler that he would

not be needed to serve dinner.

Miss Blackburne reiterated that she knew nothing of the envelope. She had had no thought for anything except the pearls. Their loss put her into an embarrassing position unless Mrs. Sands intended informing Mr. Sands and the police at once of what had happened.

"I saw by your face you didn't want me to speak when your husband came in," she said to Beverley, "so I hedged, and did the best I could without lying. I realized that you would want to be the one to break the news. But I suppose you have told him now? He'll send the police, or some private detective, won't he, to take evidence while I'm here?"

"I do want to get them back," Beverley answered. "But I haven't told my husband, and we can't have the police, or even a detective. That must seem not quite fair to you, Miss Blackburne. Whatever happens, you shan't suffer, I promise. I believe I know who has taken the pearls. If I'm right, it isn't exactly a theft. Perhaps if I go the right way about it, I can get them again. What's the good of worrying my husband, when in a day or two there may be nothing to worry about?"

"M-m-m," muttered Miss Blackburne, "I think you're wrong, Mrs. Sands. I have a feeling that Mr. Sands suspects."

"That the pearls are gone? How can he?" Beverley cried.

"I don't know, I only feel," the little woman repeated.

As the two had talked, Clo watched Miss Blackburne's face. It was with her as the pearl-stringer had said of herself: she "did not know—she could only feel" that the good little woman had something on her conscience, something that she was obliged to hide.

Clo had by this time succeeded in clearing her mind from cobwebs.

Suddenly a light shone like flame upon the mystery. "Peterson!" was the name that printed itself upon the girl's brain. "If he could have got into the flat, he could have stolen both the pearls and papers. Does Miss Blackburne know something, and if she does, why won't she tell?"

It occurred to Clo that, if she could have a few words with Miss Blackburne alone, perhaps the puzzle might be solved.

"Angel," she said, "if there's been a thief in this house, perhaps he's here still. With two manservants, you ought——"

Beverley waited for no more. Any straw was worth catching at. She couldn't wait to ring for Johnson. She rushed out of the boudoir, hoping to find the butler in the dining room. He was there. And while she explained that something had been stolen, that the flat must be searched, Clo got the chance she had wanted.

"Miss Blackburne, you're my friend!" she exclaimed. "This means life or death to me. I'm responsible for that envelope we've lost. Do, for the love of heaven, tell me what happened in this room while Mrs. Sands went out and left you here alone."

The pearl-stringer remained silent. She met Clo's great, imploring eyes without shrinking, but the girl saw that she breathed hard.

"If you don't want me to die, tell me!" Clo implored.

"My child, I would tell you, if I could," she stiffened herself. "But, you see," she finished, "there's nothing to tell. So, I can't."

# XIX

## THE BROWN TRUNK

Clo realized that there was no more to be said, since to accuse Miss Blackburne of lying would make matters worse. When Beverley came back, to say that the servants had been questioned, and the flat searched in vain, the girl had made up her mind what to do next. There were two things, one of which had better be done at once; the second, which must be done before ten o'clock. The first was to settle with Miss Blackburne; and get rid of her. The second thing was to keep the appointment with Peterson. It was more important, Clo thought, to see him than to see O'Reilly, though she expected Angel to suggest an immediate talk with O'Reilly in person or by telephone. She hoped to bring Beverley to her point of view.

"Of course, I rely on you to let me clear myself if you don't find your pearls the way you hope," Miss Blackburne reminded Beverley. "I'm sure you'll let me know when you have news. Meanwhile, there's nothing to stay for, is there? I might as well be with mother."

It was arranged that she should go home in a taxi, to save the time which must be wasted, waiting for Beverley's car. Mrs. Sands paid, of course, and gave the pearl-stringer a present of fifty dollars, "to make up for her trouble."

It was not late, as time goes, but on this night of stress and ordeal, nine-fifteen was a terrible hour. The instant Miss Blackburne was out of the house, the two girls turned to each other, and clasped hands.

"Thank God, she's gone!" Beverley breathed. "Now I'll call up Justin O'Reilly, and——"

"Wait till I tell you something I've thought of, then you can decide," Clo cut in. "I believe that horrible creature, Peterson, may be the thief, not O'Reilly. How he could have got into the flat, and out again, I can't see. But he probably specializes in stunts like that! He has the face—and the fingers—for it. I shouldn't wonder if he terrorized poor Blacky. She's not cut out for a heroine, is she? Maybe the man was under the table in the boudoir. Maybe he warned her that, if she gave him away afterward, he'd do for her and all her belongings. That

would scare Blacky blue! She worships her mother. I haven't got the tangle straightened out in my head yet. But this new idea looks good to me, so far. If Peterson's the thief—if he's pocketed the papers and the pearls—it seems to me he'll try and make a quick get-away. Let us jump on him now, at the Hotel Westmorland, before he expects us, and before bothering with O'Reilly. These pearls must be well known. Peterson can't get rid of them, even to a fence, for any big sum. I think he'd exchange, for money, and less important jewels that he might dare to sell. Haven't you got something that your husband's forgotten—or won't mind if he doesn't see you wear?"

"Yes," Beverley answered. "I have six or seven hundred dollars by me. There's a diamond muff-chain, too, and a tiara that Roger himself thinks too old looking for me. He proposed to have the stones reset—but that's months ago. He has forgotten, I'm sure, for he's given me so many other things since. I could bargain with the chain and tiara—and perhaps a few bracelets and rings."

"Let me take the jewels and money in a bag to the Westmorland. I can leave it at the desk while I do the bargaining. It's best to be on the safe side, if you're a mouse holding up a ferret! Besides, there's a question we've 'most lost sight of in this business, Angel. We're not sure the right papers were in the envelope I took from O'Reilly. They might be something else he valued."

"Why, yes!" cried Beverley. "For a moment I counted on their being the right ones—the ones I must give Peterson——"

"Well, I've only to see him to make sure," Clo went on. "He may lie, but I know I can tell by his face. Angel, waste no time on O'Reilly. There's not one second to lose! Get your jewels together, and I'll go."

"We'll both go," said Beverley. "Don't object; it's useless! I won't have you go alone. You've done more than enough already. I'm a wretch to let you slave for me, your first day out of bed! But I daren't call at Peterson's alone, not because I'm afraid for myself, but because of Roger. Besides, I can depend on you to keep your head."

"Very well," Clo consented. "The first thing that occurs to me is this: we must put on plain coats and hats. My new hat I left at the Dietz: I had to! But you'll lend me something. And we'll not 'phone for a taxi. Best slip away and not let the servants know we've gone. If you've a latch-key, we may go and even get back without a soul being the wiser."

"Come to my room and choose wraps for us both, while I collect the money and what jewels I dare spare," Beverley said. As she spoke, she ran in front of Clo, and opened a safe in the wall not unlike the hiding place Clo had rifled at the Dietz.

The girl selected two automobile coats, one of gray silk, the other of brown, both intended to match the colours of dresses, but inconspicuous and plain. There were toques made of the same material, with thin veils attached. Clo took for herself the brown coat, which was shorter than the gray, and pulled the brown toque well over her red hair. By this time Beverley had stuffed a roll of greenbacks, a chain of platinum set with brilliants, half a dozen sparkling rings and bracelets, and a flexible diamond tiara, into a dark leather handbag. Clo helped her into the long gray coat which covered her evening dress; and the two stole out of the flat like flitting shadows. They went down in the elevator, but the hall-porter was off duty for the night, having left a young understudy in charge.

The girls walked fast to the nearest taxi stand, Clo trying not to breathe hard and so remind Angel of her weakness. As the chauffeur slowed down in front of the Westmorland, Beverley held up her wrist watch for Clo to see.

"Twenty-five minutes to ten," Clo assured her confidently. "I only hope he won't have gone out. Now, you wait for me in the taxi, Angel, while I——"

"No, you're to wait for me," Beverley decided. "I can do more with the man than you, because there are things you don't know. But don't wait here. It's too far away. I might need you in a hurry. We'll keep the taxi, so there'll be no delay in getting off, and we'll both go into the hotel together. You came this afternoon, so you had better ask for Peterson. We can make up our minds what to do next when we get the answer."

A moment later a tall young woman in a gray motor cloak, and a small young woman in a brown cloak, entered the hotel. The veils that covered their close-fitting toques and fell over their faces were not thick, yet in the electric light the gauze took on a disguising glitter. The pair in their plain wraps, were not conspicuous figures even in a third-rate hotel like the Westmorland, and the clerk whom they approached was not moved to curiosity.

"Mr. Peterson? He's in; came in over an hour ago, and mentioned that he expected a caller; party to go right up."

"He's expecting us, one or both," Clo cut in hastily. "What's his number?"

"658, top floor," said the clerk. "The elevator's just over there to the left—see?"

"We'll go up together," Clo whispered, "and then, if you really think best to see the man alone, I'll hang about somewhere in the hall till you come out and call me."

Beverley made no reply. Already she was fathoms deep in thought. The musty-smelling lift shot them up to the top floor; Beverley, stepping out ahead of Clo, had the air of having forgotten her existence. The girl's anxiety deepened. The best she could do was to guide her friend through dimly lighted, dark-walled corridors, to the right number, 658. Beverley had, before they left the taxi, given the money and jewels into her companion's hand. Clo's over-strained nerves began to take their revenge. This shabby hotel was an evil place. To her it seemed that each closed door hid something secret and sinister. They met no one between the elevator and Peterson's room. Involuntarily, the two paused an instant in front of number 658 before knocking. No sound came from within. If Peterson were in his room, apparently he was alone. Beverley tapped—a sharp, nervous tap.

"Come in!" cried a voice which sounded far off, as if the speaker called from the furthest corner of the room, or from the depths of a wall cupboard.

"Keep near, but not too near," whispered Beverley, and opened the door. To her surprise and Clo's there was no light in the room; yet it was not really dark. The blind on the curtainless window opposite the door was rolled up to the top, and let in light from the brilliantly illuminated street six storeys below. As Beverley passed in, Clo caught a glimpse of a man's figure comfortably seated in a high-backed armchair in front of the window. She even recognized the mean profile of Peterson, outlined in black against the luminous square of a window pane, and anger pricked her that he should dare receive Mrs. Sands without rising. Then the door shut, and Clo, obeying the order to "keep near, but not too near," took a few steps down the corridor. Within sight of the door, but not within hearing of voices on the other side unless they should rise to a shout, she hovered uneasily.

It was hateful to Clo that Angel should be alone with the ferret-faced man behind the closed door. He might choke Beverley to death with those sly, thievish hands of his, and the sentinel outside would not know. "Why was he sitting there in the dark," she puzzled, "like a spider in his web, waiting to pounce?" She could not put away the impression that there was something more terrible even than Beverley had expected. No one came or went. After all, she had been there only

four or five minutes, though the time seemed long. It might easily be half an hour, Clo reminded herself, before she could hope to be called into consultation, or invited to hand over the precious bag. She looked wistfully toward the nearest end of the corridor. There, in front of a window, was a big brown trunk. She would go and sit on that trunk to rest. It was well within sight of Peterson's door. Her eyes would never leave that door! With renewed life she could spring up as she saw it opened by Angel.

"Yes, I've got to the limit!" the girl said. She was so spent that her feet seemed to have weights attached to them as she dragged herself toward the trunk. Reaching it, she dropped, rather than sat, upon the rounded top. No sooner had she touched the lid, however, than she bounded up as if she had received an electric shock. It seemed that something inside the trunk had given a leap, and that the great box had quivered under her. At the same instant the door of number 658 was thrown open. Beverley came out.

# XX

## MURDER

There was something not natural in Beverley's air and manner. Normally she had a proud, erect carriage. Now she came stumbling out of Number 658, and with drooping head, and shoulders bent, crept into the hall, leaving the door half open behind her; but she stopped abruptly and turned back. Clo, forgetting her own weakness, and forgetting the brown trunk, hurried to join her friend. But Beverley seemed to be unconscious of the girl's presence. She stood as far as possible from the door, closed it without noise, and was walking away again when Clo's arm slid round her waist.

"Darling, what has he said, what has he done to you?" the girl implored.

Beverley seized Clo by the wrist, and pulled her toward the lift.

"Hurry!" she whispered. "We must get away as soon as we can, for Roger's sake!"

"But what about the papers, and the pearls?" Clo persisted. "Had Peterson taken them? Did he give them to you?"

"I don't know whether he had them or not. Nothing matters now, except to get home," was the astounding answer. Clo could hardly believe that she had heard aright. Ten—five minutes ago, nothing in the world mattered, except the papers and the pearls. Now they had lost all their importance!

"You don't want them any more?" she gasped.

"Want them?" Beverley echoed. "Yes, more than ever, I want them. But it's too late. Don't ask me why. Only—come!"

Clo could not argue with Angel, or oppose her, in such a mood as this. She wished that she had taken her own way, and gone herself to "have it out" with Peterson. She felt that nothing he could have said or done would have forced her to give up without at least knowing whether or not the booty were in his possession. As she kept pace with Beverley she was screwing up her courage to one last, desperate coup. She would make it in spite of Angel!

They came to the elevator, but before Clo could put out her hand to touch the electric button, Beverley drew her farther on, to the staircase. They went down swiftly and in silence. The entrance hall of the hotel smelt of tobacco. They descended into it behind the elevator. A group of men surrounded the desk where they had inquired for Peterson, and the two girls in motor coats and veiled toques passed without catching sight of the clerk who had sent them to 658. Three or four men of the commercial traveller type glanced at the gray and brown figures; but the elevator had at that moment released a golden-haired, black-eyed young woman in a pink evening dress. She became at once an object of interest, and the plainly-cloaked pair vanished unnoticed.

The taxi, which had been ordered to wait, was at a distance. They hurried to it. It was Clo who opened the door of the cab, and almost pushed Angel in!

"Shall I tell him to go to the corner where he picked us up?" she asked. Beverley nodded, and sank back against the shabby leather cushions. This was Clo's moment. She had led up to it, and decided what to do. First she placed the bag of jewels in Beverley's lap. Next she spoke to the chauffeur, giving clear directions. Then she slammed the door shut, and stepped back upon the sidewalk, motioning to the man to start.

"Angel will be so surprised, she won't know what to do for a minute," the girl thought. "By the time she pulls herself together she'll realize it's too late to stop me."

As fast as she dared, Clo retraced her steps to the hotel. She hated to leave Beverley alone, but between two evils it seemed that she had chosen the less. When the taxi stopped Beverley would get out; and then she would have a few blocks to walk before reaching home. As for the bag, she could hardly forget it in the cab. The thing was too heavy to fall from her lap without being noticed. She would have the jewels safe, while Clo tried to bargain with ferret-face on promises of reward.

By the time she had argued away her worst tremors, Clo had again entered the Hotel Westmorland. She had decided to say that her friend had forgotten something if a question were asked; but the desk was still surrounded with its group of talkative men, and she walked to the stairs at the back of the hall as if she were a guest of the hotel. Thence she toiled to the top.

It was only when she approached the door of Number 658, and saw once more the brown trunk at the end of the hall, that Clo remembered the odd side-issue of

her adventure. She hesitated between the need for haste and the wish to solve the mystery that troubled her. But it would take only a minute to run to the trunk, to sit on it again, and see what happened! Meanwhile, any one who went in, or came out from, Number 658, must do so under her eyes.

Curiosity conquered. Clo tip-toed to the trunk, sat heavily down on the rounded top, as she had done before, and nothing happened. There was no sign of movement within; and Clo wondered if, after all, the thing that had jumped under the lid had been created by her own jumping nerves. Suddenly the impulse came upon her to try and open it. She seized the corner of the rounded lid, but it remained immovable. She picked at the metal hasp which covered the cheap lock. It did not yield, but her fingers—or she fancied it—touched moisture. The girl shrank back and looked at her hand. Thumb and forefinger were smeared with blood.

The girl felt sick, and might have fainted comfortably. "Pooh!" she scolded herself. "You've cut your finger. Serve you right for not minding your own business. Go to it now, and no nonsense, if you please!"

Goading herself to courage she marched to the door of 658 and knocked. No answer came, and the girl's heart sank. It seemed too bad to be true that Peterson should have escaped during the few minutes spent in putting Angel into a taxi. Besides, she had scarcely gone beyond eye-shot of the hotel entrance.

"Perhaps he's asleep," thought Clo. She turned the handle, and to her surprise the door yielded. She had expected to find it locked. As before, the room was unlit save by golden reflections from the street below. The girl opened the door wide, and deliberately looked in. Strange; there sat the man in his easy chair in front of the window, with his mean profile outlined against the light, just as he had sat when Beverley had answered the summons to "Come in!" One would say, to look at him, that he had not moved an inch.

Clo's theory had gone wrong. She had urged her conviction upon Angel that he was the thief; that, if he were the thief, he would "make his get-away" in haste. Yet here he sat, in the dark, asleep.

She stepped across the threshold, felt along the wall for an electric switch, found it, and flooded the room with light. Still the figure in the chair did not stir.

Clo glanced round the squalid room. Peterson had begun to pack. A suitcase lay open on the narrow bed. The wrinkled gray-white counterpane was half covered

with scattered clothing.

"If he's fast enough asleep, I can go through everything," she thought, "including his pockets!"

The girl walked in, and closed the door resolutely but softly, her eyes always upon the figure in the chair. She mustn't begin to search the place without making sure that Peterson was not playing "possum." It would be awful, when her back was turned, to have him pounce upon her like a monkey. She tip-toed across the room, and stopped in front of the easy-chair, within a yard of the stretched-out feet, where she could take a good look at the sleeper. His head was bent down over his breast, and the girl had to stoop a little to peer into the face. But a glance sent her reeling back against a chest of drawers. The top of the man's head had been crushed in by some blunt instrument. His forehead and the side of his face turned toward the window were covered with blood. His shirt and coat were soaked with it, in a long red stripe, and a dark pool had formed in a vague heart-shape on the patterned carpet.

Clo had never before seen a dead man, yet she did not doubt that this man was dead. He could have been dead for a short time only. The blood on the livid face glistened wet in the electric light. It had hardly ceased to drip from the wound in his head.

For a time Clo stood still, as if frozen. But slowly the power to think came back. To her own horror and disgust she found herself wondering if Beverley Sands had killed Peterson. It would have been a tremendous blow for a woman to strike, but Beverley was desperate, and she was strong. She had boasted of her strength of arm only the other day, to Sister Lake, who had tested and admired the splendid firmness of her young muscles. Besides, the man had been caught unawares, and had been struck from behind; the position of the wound showed that. On a small table by the chair lay the weapon. It was a long pistol, Clo did not know of what kind or make, but it looked old-fashioned; and there was no question as to the way in which it had been used. Someone had taken it by the muzzle and struck with the butt end, which was coated with blood and hairs. Perhaps the pistol had not been loaded, or perhaps the murderer—(no, "avenger" was the better word, with that fear knocking at her heart!) had not dared fire because of the noise.

Clo's mind began to work more quickly. She pieced details together. The person who had killed Peterson could not have picked up the pistol from that table

without being seen by him, therefore it had been lying there before the murder. Most likely it had lain on the bed, among the strewn things which ferret-face had begun to pack. In that case any one entering the room might have spied and snatched it, unsuspected by the man in the chair.

"If my poor, tortured Angel didn't do this, I can bear anything!" Clo told herself. "It wouldn't so much matter for me. I'd have killed him for her sake—I believe. But for her it would be horrible!"

The girl remembered the blood on her fingers, which she had found after touching the lock of the brown trunk, and this remembrance gave her hope. The murderer must have passed that way, whereas Beverley had not been near the trunk. "Thank goodness for one good bit of evidence in case it's ever needed!" Clo thought. "Who knows but the murderer was hiding in the trunk, and jumped in his fright when I plumped down on it? Well, if he did, he must either be smothered by now, since the trunk's been locked since then, or else he's escaped. Oh, Angel, how could I dream for a minute it might have been you? And yet if this wretch was dead then, who called 'Come in?'"

A wild impulse to run away seized the girl. She started toward the door, but stopped half way. No, she would not fail Angel. The man was dead. He could do her no harm. If Beverley's pearls, or if Beverley's papers, were in this room, no matter where, even if she had to touch that blood-stained coat to search the pockets, she would not go without them.

The dark blind ought to be pulled down, because from some high window she might be seen and identified afterward, if trouble came of this night's work. To reach the blind she had to step over the feet which sprawled beyond the chair; and stretching up her arm to touch the broken cord, she was conscious that her dress brushed the dead man's knees.

Next she went to the bed, and began turning over Peterson's miserable belongings. She prayed that, by a miracle, she might come across the sealed envelope. As for the pearls, if the murderer were of the Peterson type, to steal them would have been his first thought. But—it would need a stout-hearted criminal to go through the pockets of his victim, and if the motive were other than theft, it might be that the pearls and papers were still on the body. If Clo failed to find them elsewhere she would have to ransack those pockets. The thought was too horrible to dwell upon. Frantically she tossed over the contents of the suitcase, lifting and shaking every garment scattered on the bed. She

peered under the pillows; she pulled out the drawers of wash-stand and dressing-table; but there was nothing to be found there, not even a letter, not a torn morsel of paper which could serve Beverley's cause. Clo's spirit groaned a prayer for strength when at last—sick and shaking, her palms damp—she had to set about the pillage of the dead man's pockets. Some she needed merely to touch with her finger ends, to make sure that they were empty. Others had to be searched to their depths: and the girl felt convinced that she would die if in the horrid business she plunged a hand into some unseen sop of blood.

From a waistcoat pocket she pulled out a small leather cigarette case, still warm from the wearer's breast—another proof, if she had let herself think of it, that he had not long been dead. In the leather case, behind a store of tightly packed cigarettes, was a card—the cheapest sort of visiting card, on which, scrawled in pencil, was the name Lorenz Czerny. On the back of this card, in a different handwriting, but also in pencil, a memorandum had been scribbled. A glance showed Clo that it consisted of names, abbreviated addresses, and the hours of appointments, or perhaps of trains. She did not stop to examine the card thoroughly, but slipped it into her pocket for future reference, and went on with her task.

The sealed envelope she sought was too large not to protrude over the top of any pocket of a man's indoor coat; but Clo reflected that the envelope might have been destroyed, and the contents distributed, or folded into smaller compass. With this idea she spared herself nothing in her quest; but the sole reward she had (save for the cigarette case) was the finding of a paragraph cut from a newspaper, a roll of blood-stained greenbacks, which she hastily replaced, and a torn silk handkerchief. The newspaper cutting told of Roger Sands' magnificent house in Newport, whither he and his "beautiful young bride" would shortly move. This also Clo annexed, in order that no connection should seem to exist between Beverley Sands and the man Peterson when the police got to work. The handkerchief she took from the coat pocket into which it had been untidily stuffed, in order to search underneath. But the nervous jerk she gave pulled out something else also—something small, which fell to the floor with a tinkle as of a tiny stone striking wood, when it touched a chair leg, and rolled under the chest of drawers. Clo had not time to see what the thing was. There was only a flashing glimpse of a pebble-like object as it disappeared. But her heart leaped at the thought of what it might be. Thrusting the ragged handkerchief into a pocket already examined, she had just stooped to peer under the clumsy piece of furniture when a telephone bell began to ring.

The girl sprang to her feet, quivering and alert. It seemed that the bell had rung almost in her ear. Someone was calling for Peterson!

# XXI

## "KIT!"

Somehow Clo got to the telephone, which was placed on the wall by the door, and her hand trembled on the receiver before she realized that the bell which rang was in the adjoining room. There was no communicating door between, but the wall must be almost as thin as cardboard, for the noise seemed to smite her ear-drum. For an instant Clo's relief was overwhelming; but as the shrill noise struck her nerves blow after blow, they rebelled. Her brain refused to work until, suddenly, blessed silence fell.

Once more she had a sense of being saved. The power of recollection came back. She knew that she had been going to look for the thing which had dropped out of Peterson's handkerchief, and rolled out of sight. She went down on her knees for the second time, but only to spring up, and stand quivering like a creature at bay. Again the telephone bell was ringing, and now the sound was in the room. The call was for 658. She answered at once.

"Hello!" she saluted the unknown.

"Hello!" came the response, in a man's voice. "This is Chuff calling. Are you Peterson?"

"Peterson is in the room," returned Clo, after an instant's pause, in which her heart missed a beat. "But he can't come to the 'phone."

"Oh, say, is that you, Kit?" the man wanted to know.

Clo was almost incapable of thinking; but she was vaguely aware that the accent was slightly foreign. "Yes," she ventured. "It's Kit."

"Nice thing you are! I've been trying to get you the last ten minutes. Thought your room was next door to his. Couldn't you hear your own 'phone from Petes'?"

"I've just come in," said Clo.

"You're late. Anything wrong? Your voice sounds sort of queer."

"I've got chewing gum in my mouth," said Clo "What do you want to say to Pete?"

"I want to know if he's got the papers."

Clo's blood rushed to her head. This looked like a wonderful chance to tap a secret, if she didn't lose it by giving the wrong answers. Beverley Sands' whole future might depend upon the next few minutes.

"Hold the line a second or two," she said. She needed to think.

If she replied that Peterson had the papers, embarrassing questions might be asked. If she said that he hadn't, the man at the telephone might end the conversation before she had learned enough to help Angel. "I'll try hedging," she decided, and began again with a tentative "Hello!" For an instant there was no response, and Clo was sick with fear lest she had been cut off. But luck was with her. The foreign-sounding voice began again: "Well, is Pete there this time?"

"No," said the girl. "Pete is—packing. He wants me to say it isn't much after ten. He's expecting to get the papers any minute now."

"He 'phoned me he'd made ten the time limit. Didn't he tell Olga that Stephen would sure be done for if she didn't hand over the real docs by ten o'clock sharp?"

"Olga!" ... "Stephen!" ... Clo felt that she was hearing things she had no right to know.

"The lady's had her hands full all the afternoon and evening," she answered carefully. "I suppose you know what's been going on?"

"Don't know a damned thing since Pete 'phoned some little skirt had brought around the wrong papers to the hotel. Tell him to quit his packing and show up at the 'phone."

"He's gone out this very instant," said Clo. "A boy has come to the door to say there was someone to see him downstairs. Maybe it's the right one. He won't be long anyhow. But I'm just as glad to have a chance for a word with you while he's out of the way. Seems sort of funny he didn't put you wise about the excitement, you know where."

"You mean Park Avenue?"

"Yes. I can't talk in the 'phone the way I would if the wall was thicker. Didn't Pete tell you about the present of pearls the lady got from her husband?"

"What pearls?"

"I can't give you their whole history, but maybe Pete could, if he wanted to."

"What makes you think so? Have you got on to some frame up, or are you kidding?"

"Well. Somebody relieved the lady of them. That's what's made her busy the rest of the time. Might account for documents being late."

"Say, what are you giving me? Has Pete made a deal on his own?... Pearls instead of papers?"

"Hold the line again for a jiffy, and I'll go through his togs."

"All right. Look sharp."

Clo let the receiver hang loose, and for the third time went down on her knees before the chest of drawers. Thrusting her arm underneath, she passed her hand over the dirty carpet. Lodged against the wall at the back, and in a corner, was something round and hard, a thing which seemed to be about the size of a small filbert. The girl brought it out between thumb and finger, freed it of dust, and saw an immense pearl.

"That settles that!" she said to herself. Peterson was the thief. But had he stolen the envelope as well as the pearls? Oh, if she could only galvanize the dead to speak! But the next best thing was to speak to the telephone. The truth might come from that direction, bit by bit, piecing the different parts of the story together.

Clo, getting to her feet again, was struck with a sudden luminous idea.

"Kit," the woman she was personating, the woman apparently set to watch Peterson, had found out about the pearls. Either she had believed him a traitor to the "gang," or she had wanted the pearls for herself. In either case she had killed him to get them; and one pearl had escaped to tell the tale of its fellows.

Yes, "Kit" had the pearls. But where were they, and where was she? The woman was not in her room, because the telephone bell had been ringing there and she hadn't answered. What if she hadn't been able to get back to her room after the

murder? Kit might have locked her door when she came to have a chat with Peterson. It was likely enough there'd be things in her quarters which she wouldn't want a prying chambermaid to see! Perhaps she'd seen Peterson looking at the pearls. Perhaps, when she knocked, he had thrust the broken rope back into his pocket with the loose pearls. Perhaps Kit had put him off his guard, chatting of other things, while he packed. But no, she had caught him unawares when he sat as he was sitting now! Clo pictured her offering to help him pack. He had lolled comfortably while Kit worked. Then, she had come behind him and dealt that frightful blow with the butt of his own pistol. A strong, determined woman, Kit!

Clo remembered how she and Beverley had walked slowly from the corridor of the lift into Peterson's corridor, looking at the numbers over the doors; and remembered how she had said to Angel, "This must be the right way to turn." Even after that, they had paused a moment for Beverley to gather up her failing courage; and if Kit had then been in the act of opening the trunk, she could easily have hidden herself inside before the owners of the voices she heard had turned the corner. It must have given her a beautiful fright when someone sat down on the trunk with a thud! No wonder she had jumped, and made the big box shake!

Kit's actions later could be plausibly accounted for, too. She must have guessed that one of the women she had heard speaking (had seen, perhaps, if she contrived to peep from the trunk when their backs were turned) had been in Peterson's room. How she must have wished that she'd taken time to lock his door on the outside! As it was, she couldn't have been sure that an alarm would not be given downstairs. Her one thought must have been haste; and Clo doubted that, if she had forgotten her key in Peterson's room, she would have ventured back to get it. No, she would have crept out of the trunk, and looked at her dress in the dim light to see whether blood stains showed. If she wore dark clothing, she might have run the risk. Clo pictured her locking the trunk, and following, as closely as she dared, the cloaked figures in gray and brown; pictured her pausing in the background to see whether the pair stopped at the desk, or went away with their secret; pictured her relief when they passed on in silence; and the bid for freedom she must have made a minute later.

"I bet, by the time we were in our taxi, that woman was out of this, and legging it as fast as she could go. She wouldn't have taken a cab, for fear of being traced," Clo finished her reflections. She stared at the pearl in her hand.

"Awkward for me if Kit gets to the man at the other end while her double chats to him at the Westmorland!" the girl thought, and flew back to the telephone. "Are you there?" she called.

"You bet your sweet life I'm here. Did you find the beans?"

"I've found something I must bring to you. Where's the safest place?"

"What's the matter with here?"

"It won't do," she answered. "It's on account of Pete!"

"Well, then, come to Churn's. When'll you be there?"

This was a blow. Clo was angling for an address, with street and number. But she would not be downed by one disappointment. "Same reason holds good for Churn's," she said. "Can't you think of some place Pete doesn't know? And think quick, or he'll be back."

"Think quick yourself! We'll go round to your own house, you dub! Pete ain't sure where your real pitch is—unless you've blabbed."

"I may have dropped something that's put him wise," the girl persisted in desperation. "I tell you I'm not talking to hear myself talk when I ask for a new place."

"Krantz's Keller, then, eleven thirty."

"Right for Krantz's Keller. But I can't be sure of eleven thirty. I'll have to keep an eye on Pete till I know what he's up to. Maybe I can 'phone you there. What's Krantz's number?"

"Can't give it to you without looking it up. Haven't you got the book there?"

"No. Somebody must have nicked it."

"Ain't there one in your own room next door?"

"Yes. But say—a fool thing's happened. I locked my door when I came in to Pete's, and I've dropped my key."

"Find it, and go look at the book. Jake's got mine. I'll call you up in your room in five minutes. Then if Pete's back it won't matter. See?"

"Yes. But——Have you gone?"

There was no answer. Clo could do nothing save hang up the receiver, and begin to search for a key which, despite her elaborate deductions, might be in "Kit's" pocket for all she knew. Luck was with her once more, however. On the floor by the mantelpiece lay a key, almost hidden in the deep fur of a mangy, goat-hair rug. Clo might have wasted twice the time in her search, had she not stepped on it.

"I'll make the best of a bad bargain," she promised herself. "If I must go to Kit's room, I won't throw away a single second."

She fastened Peterson's door on the outside, and fitted the key she had found, into the lock of the door at the left, in front of which stood the brown trunk.

The key served, as she had felt certain it would. Hastily she locked herself into the room, and switched on the light. It was a mean little room, a facsimile of Peterson's in most of its features, but a woman's clothing hung from hooks on the door, and on the bed and chairs and dressing table a woman's belongings were flung untidily about; hats, gloves, collars, and a handbag of jet and steel beads. Kit must have hated to leave that bag, thought Clo. She drew the ribbons, and took a hasty peep at the bag's contents. There was a soiled suede purse, and in that purse, mixed up with a few greenbacks, there were some papers. Clo dared not stop to examine them. She could only hope that they might give clues which she had failed to obtain from the telephone.

There were four or five frocks hanging on the door, showy blouses and bright-coloured skirts; but Clo searched in vain for pockets. In the chest of drawers, which was the twin of Peterson's, was a certain amount of underclothing, much trimmed with cheap lace. There were silk petticoats with torn frilling, and shoes and slippers. But nothing was marked with name, or even initials. Kit, though gaudily coquettish in her taste, was apparently careless in her habits. Clo no longer visioned Kit large, masculine, and determined, a tigress woman. Instead she saw a lithe, cat-like creature, strong, no doubt (it had taken strength to strike that blow and Clo would have staked her life that it had been struck by Kit) but not big or massive.

The five minutes grace must certainly have passed before Clo had come to the end of her inspection, but the telephone was silent. This struck the girl as ominous, for it might mean that Kit had appeared in person at the other end of the line. It might mean that some trap was being laid to catch Kit's double.

"If she turns up, and tells everything, they can't let me get away with what I know, even about Krantz's Keller," Clo told herself. "They'll have to send someone to watch, especially if they think I'm a 'tec, who's found Peterson's body. They won't know what I'm like. All the same, if they don't call me up in just one minute more, I must make a bolt. I'll count sixty, and—see what happens."

# XXII

## THE VOICE THAT DID NOT SEEM STRANGE

What happened was that the telephone began ringing in the next room—Peterson's room. It began when Clo had counted up to forty.

She had hoped not to go back to the room of the dead man. She had searched it from end to end. But now she knew the thing would have to be done.

Already the jet and steel bag hung by its ribbons over her arm. Clo switched off the electricity, and let herself out into the hall. Before she had finished her count of sixty seconds she was once more locked in Peterson's room. So confidently had she expected to hear the same foreign-sounding accents that she almost dropped the receiver and started away when her "Hello!" was answered by a strange voice.

Yet—was it a strange voice? As it went on to ask: "Is this Mr. Peterson?" Clo had a strong impression that she had heard the voice before. Assuredly it was not the one which had talked to "Kit," but it sounded astonishingly familiar. Though she could not yet identify the tones recognition was only a question of instants.

"This is Mr. Peterson's room," she replied. "He is—here. He wishes me to speak for him."

"I had better tell you before we go further, then, that I'm talking for Mr. John Heron. When you have explained that, Mr. Peterson will decide whether he'd rather come to the 'phone and attend to the business himself."

Clo was glad of the pause. "John Heron!" That was the man Peterson had mentioned during her second conversation with him. He had said that Roger Sands was "working for John Heron" when Roger and Beverley met in the train; and she—Clo—had heard the name with a queer thrill which she could not understand. So far as she knew, it was strange to her: yet she seemed to have heard it in dreams—sad dreams, where someone had sobbed in the dark. Through the strenuous adventures which had kept body and brain busy the girl had recalled it again and again, since the moment when the name had fallen from Peterson's lips. She had wondered if she would ever have the "cheek" to ask

Angel who was John Heron. Whoever he might be, John Heron was in some way concerned with Beverley's secret, or Peterson would not have spoken his name in that connection.

She answered quietly: "Mr. Peterson allows me to go on speaking for him."

"Very well," returned the voice. "Mr. Peterson called Mr. Heron up not long ago, to say he could sell him a rope of fine pearls for Mrs. Heron, at a low price. He'd heard, it appears, that Mr. Heron wished to buy pearls, and he suggested an appointment for to-night. Mr. Heron did not receive this message himself; he was indisposed at the time it came, and Mrs. Heron took it, but was unable to answer for her husband. He asks me to say, in his name, that if Mr. Peterson has some particularly fine pearls to dispose of, he'll be pleased to look at them, not to-night, but to-morrow morning about ten o'clock, at his hotel, the Dietz."

"The Dietz!" cried Clo. "Now I know who's speaking to me. You're Justin O'Reilly!"

Inadvertently she had kept her lips at the receiver. The cry had flown to the man who held the line.

"And you're my girl burglar! By Jove, I thought I knew that voice! Are you in the pearl business, too? Has Mrs. Sands commissioned you and some fellow called Peterson to sell her pearls to Mrs. Heron? Now I begin to see light! She tried to make a bargain with me over those pearls. I refused in Heron's name and my own. What's her game now, when there's nothing left to bargain for, and you've sent the papers back?"

"Sent the papers back!" Clo gasped into the telephone. This coming into touch with O'Reilly over the wire had been a shock. But she forgot the surprise of it in the new surprise of his last words.

"Wasn't it you who sent them?" he went on.

She stopped to think before daring a reply. O'Reilly had got the papers back, or he wanted her to think so, for some reason of his own.

"Well, if you must know, perhaps I did send them," she prevaricated.

"I'm glad to have this chance to thank you for repenting. I felt at the time you weren't the stuff trick-confidence-ladies and burglaresses are made of."

"I didn't exactly repent," confessed Clo. "I had an object to gain. I'm glad the papers weren't lost on the way. You're sure no one had tampered with the envelope?"

"Apparently not. The messenger handed it to me sealed up and seemingly intact, with the address of my bank on it in my own handwriting. The boy wouldn't say how he knew I was staying at the Dietz. He is an ornament to his profession! I want you to know that I don't bear malice."

As Clo listened she was surprised at the soothing effect of his voice upon her nerves. It was like hearing the voice of a friend. After all, why should they be enemies, since of the two O'Reilly was the injured party, and had just assured her that he didn't "bear malice?" But he was going on to ask what was the "object" she had wished to gain. "Do you mean to tell me, or is it one of your many mysteries?"

"I realized I'd gone to work with you in the wrong way," she ventured. "Now I need someone's help. I need it horribly. It ought to be a man's help. And, except Mr. Sands, you're the only man I know."

She heard O'Reilly laughing. He wouldn't laugh if he could see what her eyes saw!

"So you want to call a truce?" he asked.

"Yes, if I could trust you."

"I like that! I wasn't the betrayer. But never mind. Your second thoughts are best. And anyhow, you weren't working for yourself. Do you really want my help?"

"Don't I? But it would be for—for——You know whom I mean. And you're her enemy, aren't you?"

"Not the least in the world. But I can't buy her pearls, and I'm sure Heron will refuse to bargain if——"

"The pearls aren't for sale any more. They've been stolen. She thinks you took them for a hold-up."

"The devil she does! But you know better. Tell me what you wish me to do for you, and I'll do it; I wanted to see you again. You were like a bad but interesting dream, broken off in the midst, that I longed to dream over again."

"I *feel* as if I had been broken off in the midst!" said Clo. "I may be broken past mending if somebody doesn't pick up the pieces good and quick! What I want you to do is to meet me outside the Westmorland. Will you? And if so, how soon?"

"I will," came the answer. "I'll be there in eight minutes, with a taxi. Does that suit you?"

"Yes. Have the taxi drawn up in front of the hotel, and as it slows down, I'll jump in. Give the chauffeur an order—before he starts—not to stop, you know, but to go on the instant I'm in. A lot may depend on that."

"What mischief have you been up to?" asked the laughing voice, which to Clo, in the room of death, seemed to come from another world.

She shuddered as her eyes turned to the figure in the chair.

"Good-bye!" she said, and hung up the receiver without another word.

Eight minutes! It would take her about three to get out of the room, down the stairs, and to the front door—if all went well. What was she to do with the other five? Now that her mission was ended, she could not stay where she was. She had reached, and almost passed, the limit of her endurance. One idle moment in that place would surely drive her mad! Yet she could not stand in the street, waiting for O'Reilly to come to the rescue. Kit and the man who had talked to Kit might be ready to pounce upon her there.

# XXIII

## "WHAT'S DONE CAN'T BE UNDONE"

"Don't be frightened, Mums! It's only me, back earlier than I expected," Ellen Blackburne announced herself at the door of her mother's bedroom.

Mrs. Blackburne was propped up in bed, reading Young's "Night Thoughts."

"Of course, I'm not frightened!" she reassured her daughter. "I'm only surprised. That's what makes my hands tremble."

"I was in hopes you'd have gone to sleep," said Ellen, "and I could slip in without giving you a start. I stopped the taxi at the corner on purpose."

"I'm delighted to have you back. But why did you bring the pearls home to string? Now you'll be sitting up the whole blessed night!"

"Don't you worry!" Ellen soothed her. "I'm not going to sit up. I'm going to bed. Shall I leave the door open between the rooms while I undress, or shall I just kiss you good-night now, and let you rest in peace?"

The little woman had sat down on the edge of the bed, but as she spoke, she stood up. It struck the older woman that, for some reason, she was in a hurry to get away.

"There's something you don't want to tell me, isn't there, dear?" her mother quietly observed.

"Well, you have the most wonderful intuition!" Ellen praised her parent. "I believe you could see through a wall. It's only that I didn't want to wake you up and make you nervous, so you would have a bad night."

"I shall have a better night if I don't need to rack my brain thinking over what might have happened."

"Oh, all right!" sighed Ellen, and sat down again. "You're a grand safety valve, you know, Mums, because I can talk to you, and be sure that whatever I say will be locked up in your strong box. I meant to write all this down in my notebook,

with initials instead of names; but the diary can't give advice. You can. Only—you're certain we hadn't best wait till to-morrow?"

"I shouldn't close my eyes!" said Mrs. Blackburne. "But I can say this to begin with: You did the right thing. You always do."

"This is different from anything that ever came into my experience," Ellen answered.

"I told you before I started, I thought I was in for an exciting job. It wasn't only that Mr. Sands is a sort of celebrity, and everyone has been talking of Mrs. Sands as a beauty. It was the man himself gave me a kind of thrilled feeling the minute I saw him. Mums, Roger Sands is the sort I could fall in love with, if I was the falling-in-love type. He's strong and silent. He isn't a bit a woman's man. I don't know how to describe him, exactly. He made me feel as if I longed to do something for him. I was mighty keen to see what Mrs. Sands would be like. I suppose to see what style of woman he'd worship enough to pick up from the gutter."

"Goodness me, child!" broke in Mrs. Blackburne, absorbed. "You don't mean that's where she came from? I never heard——"

"No—no! I oughtn't to have used that expression," Ellen confessed, "though they tell all sorts of stories about her origin. I daresay none of 'em are right, and not a soul knows the truth. People have given her a nickname: 'the girl from nowhere.' But you've only to see her to realize at once that whatever she was, she must have been brought up like a princess."

"Handsome?"

"A dream of beauty. She's worthy of her husband that way, but she's not in other ways. That's my excuse."

"Your excuse, lovey? For what?"

"For what I did. But you won't know why I did it, or forgive me for doing it, unless I tell you the story as I understand it."

"Go right on, dear, and take your time. I won't interrupt again." So Ellen gave her mother a succinct account of all that had befallen her, until the fateful moment when she discovered that the pearls were not in their case.

"The case empty! The pearls gone! My goodness me!" gasped the old lady.

"I never had such a scare in my life. Mrs. Sands had told me how she'd been dressing in her bedroom, with the door wide open into the boudoir, because the pearls were there, all ready for me to begin on, if I arrived before she'd got into her gown. She either believed the pearls were in the case, or else she wanted me to believe she believed it! The desperate state she was in, under her pretty manner, made me think maybe she was playing some dreadful trick, and after I'd got over the first shock of surprise I was mad with that woman. 'She doesn't care if she ruins me, so she can save herself from a scrape,' was what I thought about her. I made up my mind I wouldn't be catspaw, to pull her chestnuts out of the fire."

"What did you do?" breathed Mrs. Blackburne, sitting straight up in bed.

"I rang the bell for the butler. He came to the door in an instant. I told him to call Mrs. Sands at once, it was urgent. I thought that would fetch her, but it didn't. It was the man who came back. He seemed a bit embarrassed: Mrs. Sands was very busy at the moment, it would be a little while before she was at liberty. It came into my head that she was leaving me alone as long as possible in the room where her wonderful pearls were supposed to be, so she could accuse me of making away with them, when the truth had to come out, that the pearls were gone. I saw just one thing to do. I told the butler to call Mr. Sands, quick. 'Mr. Sands is just going,' he said. 'I was ready to help him on with his coat when you rang.' 'Well, beg him to step in here one instant,' said I. The man went out; and I couldn't have counted ten before Mr. Sands appeared. I pointed to the empty case that was open on the table, and explained in about a dozen words—I wanted to finish before Madam arrived!—that Mrs. Sands had told me to look in the case for the pearls; that she went out in a hurry; and when I looked, the pearls weren't there. 'I sent and asked her to come,' I went on, 'but she was busy.'

"Well, Mother, the face of that man just broke my heart! It was more as if some awful thing he'd half expected, had come true. I might have stuck a knife in his heart.

"'Does my wife know you asked for me when she couldn't come?' was the first thing he said after he'd stood quite still for a second or two. I told him no, I'd taken the responsibility on myself, and I hoped I hadn't done wrong.

"'Not wrong,' said he. 'You meant well, I'm sure. Still, I wish the news had come to me from my wife and no one else.'

"Then he walked over to the window, and stood looking out. If I hadn't known he was there, I shouldn't have seen him. The curtains were drawn, not all across, but partly, and it was a sort of bay window, so there was room for him to stand behind the curtains, in the shadow they made. He hadn't been there two seconds, I give you my word, when the door flew open, and Mrs. Sands bounced in.

"'You sent for me?' she asked, and threw a look round the room, as if searching for someone. I felt I should die if her husband came out—but he didn't. I managed to stammer that the pearls weren't in their case, and so on; and it seemed as if my words turned her to a block of marble! She just stared at me. 'Maybe you think I stole the pearls!' I said right out. She assured me quite nicely that she believed nothing so foolish, and that even if I'd wanted to steal the things, I couldn't have smuggled them away from the house. (Of course, I could, though, if there had been time.) My heart melted to her, I must confess. But I was thinking more of her husband. It was up to me to get him out of the fix. I suggested to Mrs. Sands calling in Clo, to see what she could make of the business. The instant she was gone, out from the bay window stalked her husband! By that time I was at the door. I'd opened it for Mrs. Sands. I hardly dared glance at him—it seemed so prying. All I know—for sure, now—is that he stopped for an instant at the table. He had to pass it, on the way from his hiding place to the door. I supposed then, when he paused there, that he would be gazing at the empty velvet case. But he may have been doing something different—I'll tell you why and what, in a minute.

"I stood without moving, and, as he came near the door he stopped again. 'Miss Blackburne,' he said, 'you've been mixed up against your will, and not by any fault of your own, in an unfortunate business. It's a family affair, and I feel certain you'll keep your own counsel. Don't think I'm trying to bribe you. I'm not. But I should like you to accept this.' My arms were hanging straight down at my sides, but he managed to stick something into one of my hands. What do you think it was?"

"Fifty dollars?" her mother guessed.

"Fifty fiddlesticks! It was five hundred!"

"My heavens! Enough to pay off the mortgage. But you couldn't possibly accept it?"

"I said no. I swore that I'd done nothing to earn a cent: that wild horses wouldn't drag from me anything I'd seen, or heard, or even imagined, in his house. But

Mr. Sands insisted. 'It will give me pleasure for you to have the money. It's little enough,' he said. Then he walked right out. He must have gone back to his own room instead of leaving the flat just then, for I saw him again later. I'll tell you about that. But do you think it was wrong to keep the money?"

"In the circumstances, no," Mrs. Blackburne decided. "It would have hurt his feelings to give it back. Oh, my dear, five hundred dollars! It's like a fairy gift, just when we're needing it so much!"

"Well, I'd got the bills tucked away when Mrs. Sands came running in. She made for the table, the way a pointer goes for a shot bird. She hadn't a glance for the velvet case. She was searching for something else. Oh, Mother, it scared me to see her! She threw everything about. She was out of her head. A tall vase of flowers tipped over, and splashed water on the books, and even on the velvet case. I don't think she knew it had happened. Books fell on the floor. She didn't see or care. Then she sank all of a heap into a big chair close by. 'The envelope?' she gasped, as if she were choked by a hand on her throat. 'It was there. Where is it now?'

"I told her I hadn't seen any envelope, which was perfectly true. She described it: quite a big, long envelope, made of linen, and sealed up with several red seals. I swore over again I hadn't seen an envelope of any description. At last she had to believe me. But the worst was to come. 'Did you leave the room, for so much as a second, after I left you?' she asked, with her eyes on my face. I told her I hadn't stirred outside the door; but what I was scared of came next: 'Did any one come in?'"

"Oh, lovey, I hope you didn't have to tell a falsehood?"

"That depends on what you call a falsehood," said Miss Blackburne. "I hate fibs as much as you do. But it was an awful fix!"

"It was," Mums agreed.

"You see," Ellen went on, to make her position clear, "I had asked Mr. Sands not to let his wife know I'd called him in. Later, he pressed that money on me, and I accepted it. I felt as if it had bought me, body and soul. When he stood by the table, he must have seen that envelope, and taken it. Well, now, I ask you, could I give him away?"

"I don't see how you could," wailed the old lady.

"Neither did I. 'Did any one come in?' I echoed, when Mrs. Sands put the question. 'Wouldn't I have mentioned it to you the first thing, if any one had?' Was that a falsehood, or wasn't it?"

"It was a prevarication," answered Mrs. Blackburne, "and I think I should have done the same thing."

"Thank goodness!" sighed Ellen. "That's what I wanted to know. You don't blame me, then?"

"I feel you acted for the best. And it's done now!"

"Yes, it's done, and can't be undone," the pearl-stringer echoed.

# XXIV

## ROGER'S APPOINTMENT AT THE CLUB

Roger Sands dined alone at his club that night. Many men hailed him as he came in, very late, and in sixty seconds he received six invitations to dine. He refused them all, however.

It was with the hope of meeting a certain man that Roger had gone to the club. He had excused himself to Beverley on the plea of an appointment, because he had wanted to be alone, and had no intention of dining anywhere.

It was upon an impulse that he had taken the sealed envelope addressed to Justin O'Reilly. Afterward, he felt that his whole course of conduct, from the moment he had entered the room till the moment he had left the flat, was radically wrong. He ought, perhaps, to have shown himself to Beverley when she came in, despite Miss Blackburne's appeal. If he had done this, he would have learned the truth about that envelope. Seeing her husband at such a moment, Beverley must have betrayed herself, Roger thought, if there were anything to betray in connection with the envelope. Had its concealment been important, she would mechanically have sprung to hide it. Had it been left inadvertently by O'Reilly, for no concern of hers, Beverley's ignorance of his presence, or her indifference, would have cleared her in Roger's eyes.

He could not contemplate confessing to Beverley that he had hidden himself and then taken the envelope. She would probably say: "I never dreamed that you'd be mean enough to spy upon me! Why didn't you show yourself, like a brave man, instead of hiding?"

No, he would not tell Beverley that he had been a witness of the scene between her and the pearl-stringer; nor that he was responsible for the vanishing of O'Reilly's envelope. Let her think what she liked about its loss, just as he—Roger—was free to think what he liked about the loss of the pearls! He would wait for Beverley to tell him that the pearls were gone. Her carelessness, to say the best of it, her ingratitude and disloyalty, to say the worst, gave him the right to keep his knowledge to himself. He would wait and see what Beverley meant to do. Then he decided to send back the sealed letter to O'Reilly. Ten minutes

after leaving home he had given the envelope to a messenger, with directions to take it at once to the Dietz.

It was when he had thus disciplined himself, that Roger turned toward the club. A man who was an old acquaintance of Roger's, and a friend of O'Reilly's, often dropped in there on a Sunday evening. Possibly he would come that night. Roger had thought of a question to ask. He saw that there might be a way to getting even with O'Reilly, a way just as efficacious, and more open, than the one he had sacrificed.

While he pretended to dine and read an "evening edition," a hateful little voice in Roger's brain chirped suggestions to him. What if Beverley had somehow been in O'Reilly's power? What if she had written him love letters which afterward she wished to get back, and he refused to surrender? What if she had contrived to steal them, and O'Reilly had followed, for reprisals? What if, since then, the man had been torturing her, and Clodagh Riley (a poor relation of Justin O'Reilly's, perhaps) had been acting as a go-between? What if the girl had pretended illness as an excuse to bring O'Reilly into the flat, and the man had frightened Beverley into giving him the pearls?

He was sipping his demi tasse, and had ceased to expect the man he wanted, when that man walked into the room. Before he could sit down at a neighbouring table Roger hailed him; a small, dark man of Jewish type, a man of forty-five, perhaps, with the brilliant eyes of a scientist and the arched brows of a dreamer.

"Hello, Doctor Lewis! I've been hoping you'd blow in!" Sands said cordially. "Won't you dine with me?"

"But you've finished. I'd be keeping you."

"I want a talk with you, my dear chap," Roger assured him.

The doctor sat down at Sands' table.

"I'd have got here a long while ago," Doctor Lewis went on to explain, "but just as I was leaving the Dietz, where I have a patient, I was asked to stop and see—whom do you think?"

"Your friend, O'Reilly, perhaps. Someone mentioned to me that he was there."

"No," said Lewis, "not O'Reilly, but as it happens, a friends of O'Reilly's, in the same hotel, who suddenly collapsed."

"I can guess, then," replied Sands. "I know the Herons are at the Dietz. Your patient was one of those two—Mrs. Heron, I should say. I don't somehow see Heron 'collapsing.'"

"My patient was Heron, not his wife. The attack was nothing serious, but Mrs. H —— was scared. You and Heron are as fast friends as ever, of course?"

"I admire John Heron in many ways," Roger answered, indirectly.

"And he ought to admire you, as certainly he does! A good many people thought you risked your life, throwing yourself into that business in California, the way you did, Sands. But you came out on top, and brought Heron out on top. Your reward was great!"

Roger smiled. He was thinking of the journey back, after his triumph, and of Beverley. She had been his reward. Once it had seemed great.

"Have you seen Heron since he got to New York?" said the doctor.

"Not yet," said Sands.

"Well, he's hardly more than just arrived. Heron's a wiry chap. It needs a good deal to knock him over. If it had happened last summer, or fall, when the big row was on, there'd have been plenty of excuse, as Mrs. Heron remarked. It appears the two had been quietly sitting together down below, in the big hall, watching the crowd, and waiting for Justin O'Reilly to go in with them to dinner. Mrs. H —— sent Heron back to their bedrooms to find something she'd forgotten. She got scared at last when time passed and neither Heron nor O'Reilly came down. She went to see for herself what was up, and found her husband in a fainting fit. She 'phoned just as I was leaving my other patient, and by the time I arrived on the scene O'Reilly had floated in from the next-door suite. He'd been out while the Herons thought he was dressing to dine with them. All's well that ends well. Heron will be as brisk as ever in a day or two."

"I'm glad to hear that," Roger said, gravely. "As you say, Heron's not a man to be knocked over easily. Last year, when I was in California, he came within an ace of being shot one night, and never turned a hair."

"His wife was asking him, when he came to, a lot of questions. Heron wouldn't want to worry her, naturally. Didn't she have some great shock last summer, or fall, while you were out West? A brother who was killed, or killed himself?"

"A brother who died suddenly. There was no proof of violence. The young man's death occurred the day I left, and not in California, but in New Mexico—near the town of Albuquerque, at a house belonging to Mrs. Heron. The Herons haven't been married many years," Roger went on. "Not more than eight or ten. Mrs. Heron can't be much over thirty. I never saw the brother. He was something of an invalid, and lived always at the Albuquerque place. His handsome sister stayed with him sometimes. He was a few years younger than she."

Sands had the air of giving these details somewhat grudgingly, as a concession to the very evident curiosity of Lewis: but having satisfied it as far as necessary, he turned the conversation to his own affairs: the affairs, in fact, which had suggested to him this meeting with the doctor.

"Whenever I have leisure just now I cut down to Newport to see how the decorators get on with an alleged 'cottage' I've bought there for my wife," he said. "It's been quite an amusement to me for the past few weeks. I'm tired of living in an apartment, though ours isn't bad, as flats go. I want a house, and I want an old one, or my wife does, with a little romance of history attached to it. I'd like to get hold of one, as a surprise for her. I know there aren't many in the market. I suppose there's nothing good down in your neighbourhood?"

"Well, as you know, Gramercy Park and all round there has been pretty thoroughly modernized," said Lewis, who lived in a big new house of apartments, not far from Gramercy Park. "The only fine, old-fashioned mansion I can think of, that would just suit you is Miss Theresa O'Reilly's—a patient of mine—when she's any one's patient. Do you know anything about the ancient dame?"

Roger knew so much that he had waited for Lewis entirely for the reason that Miss Theresa O'Reilly was a patient of his.

"Isn't she related to your friend, Justin O'Reilly?" he inquired.

"She's a distant cousin. As for the house, Justin feels that it ought to be his. I have this from her, not from him. The old lady told me the other day that she heard Justin had been hoarding up his money to buy the house, and was coming to New York on purpose to talk matters over, but she would refuse to see him."

"A cranky old bird!" Sands sympathized.

"You're right. Last year she mentioned to several people, me among others, that

she thought of offering the place for sale if she could get a good price, because the New York climate gave her rheumatism, and she'd like to try the French Riviera. But the minute she'd spoken to me—a friend of Justin's—she could have cut out her tongue. You see, Justin's great-great-grandfather built the house: an Irishman who came over before the Revolution, and fought with the Americans against the English. It remained in the family till a few years before Justin's birth, when his father was obliged to sell through poverty, and move out West. This old lady, Theresa O'Reilly, was the purchaser. She was, of course, a youngish woman then, though no chicken. The story is that she loved Justin's father, and tried to catch him with her money—she was a rich heiress. He was on the point of engaging himself when he fell desperately in love with a poor girl Theresa employed as social secretary, or something of the sort. Out of revenge, Theresa went to work in secret ways to ruin Justin Senior, who was a gay, careless fellow, without too much money to lose, or too much patience to make more. She's said to have put men up to lead him into bad investments. Anyhow, she got the house, and California got the man and his family. I imagine there was a hard struggle out there at first. Young Justin has had to carve his own fortune: his father and mother, and an older brother, died when he was a boy. All this long story came out of your wanting an old house. It can't have interested you much, I'm afraid!"

"Certainly, there's enough romance attached to that house!" said Roger, with a short laugh. "But Miss O'Reilly has changed her mind, and won't sell?"

"So she assures me," answered Lewis. "You see, she couldn't be sure Justin wasn't standing behind a dummy buyer, now she knows he's definitely after the place, and able to purchase for a decent price. I take it that in the circumstances she won't sell to any one. Perhaps she never meant to when the test came."

"So poor O'Reilly wants the home of his ancestors?"

"He does. I've known of that dream for years. He told me once he'd grown up with it."

Roger made his comment upon this: but he determined to write to Miss O'Reilly the moment Lewis had gone.

# XXV

## KRANTZ'S KELLER

Clo had been able to think very clearly, while there had been something definite to think about, but her brain refused this problem of an extra five minutes, which might mean success or failure. She couldn't stop where she was; she couldn't hang about in the street, lest the real Kit had given the false Kit away to the "gang"; yet to dawdle in the corridor, or on the stairs of the Westmorland Hotel, was unthinkable. When the murder of Peterson was discovered someone might remember that slim girl in brown. The police were diabolically clever—now and then. Who could say if they might not trace that girl in brown, and, finding her, eventually reach Beverley Sands?

"One minute must have gone, just while I've been thinking of it!" Clo told herself. "And Peterson hasn't come alive. Now, if I can only think hard enough, and forget him and the silence, for two or three minutes, I can start."

But the silence broke. Once more her nerves thrilled to the telephone bell. She was standing by the door, her back resolutely turned to the figure in the chair, when the sound began. The girl snatched the receiver and called "Hello" but no one answered. She must get out quickly, at the risk of having to wait in the street before O'Reilly could arrive.

"Unless they live close by, they won't have had time to reach me yet, even if Kit's given the show away," Clo thought. But of course, "Chuff" might have 'phoned from a house round the corner. Peterson might have chosen the Westmorland Hotel in order to be near his friends!

Clo locked the door, took out the key, and dropped it behind the trunk at the end of the hall. That would not be unfair to the owner of the trunk, she thought, for in any case, the blood stains would direct suspicion to Peterson's vanished neighbour. The key would be only a detail.

As she descended the stairways leading from the sixth story to the ground floor, she met two or three men, but they had the air of tired commercial travellers going up to bed. Apparently the veiled girl in brown had no special interest for them. Next came the ordeal of the entrance hall, and passing the desk; but there a

new group of men had collected. Clo peered through her brown veil, but encountered no curious glances. Yet the worst was to come. The eight minutes could hardly have run out; besides, O'Reilly might be late. If "Kit" were true to her pals, and if she had seen from her hiding place in the trunk, who went into Peterson's room, the coming moment might hold the greatest peril of all. The girl hesitated at the door, then sprang into the street as she might have sprung into a wave.

Plenty of people were passing as she walked slowly away. She had not taken many steps, however, when a taxi separated itself from others in the double line of moving vehicles, and slackened speed near the curb. The window was open, and Justin O'Reilly was looking out. Clo gave a welcoming cry, and waved Kit's bead bag. He caught her eye, spoke to the chauffeur, and the taxi slowed down, short of the hotel entrance. The girl ran back. O'Reilly held the door ajar, and, putting out his hand, pulled her in while the car was in motion. He had not forgotten her orders, and had instructed the driver. On bounded the taxi, as the door slammed shut, and the sudden jerk, before Clo was seated, flung her into O'Reilly's arms. He held her for a second or two, and then carefully set her by his side.

"By Jove, I'm glad to have you safe!" he said in a warm, kind voice, which for some reason made Clo want to cry. "I've a hundred things to say and ask, you child or imp, but first of all, where do you want to go? Home, or——"

"To Krantz's Keller," Clo finished the sentence. "Do you know where it is?"

"Yes," said O'Reilly. "I know, though I've never been. But——"

"I've got to go there," said Clo. "If you don't like, you needn't."

"I do like!" he laughed. "What do you know about Krantz's Keller?"

"I'll tell you that, and other things, when we arrive," said Clo. "Please, what time is it?"

"No thanks to you that I have a watch, and can answer that question," he thrust at her slyly. The street lights turned to ivory the small face from which Clo had pushed back the veil. It was a child's face, though not impish or defiant now; but the great dark eyes, it seemed to the man, were a woman's eyes. He was conscious that never in his life had he been so intensely interested in a female thing. She had tricked him, she had deceived and she had robbed him. Yet his

dominant feeling was joyous triumph at having found her when he had thought her lost. He was happy because she had summoned him, excited because they were going side by side toward some unknown adventure.

He looked at his watch which had been retrieved from the wall safe, and said that the time was twelve minutes to eleven. Krantz's Keller was in Fourteenth Street, and they could reach there at the hour, for already the cab was moving in the right direction. "Are you in a hurry?" he asked, "or shall we go a round-about way and talk things over? The Keller won't be at its best till nearly midnight."

"I've a—sort of appointment at eleven-thirty," Clo said. "But I'd like to be on the spot before that, for a look round to get my bearings. I daresay I can tell you the whole story in twelve minutes. I've learned the lesson to-night that almost anything can happen, and you can live years in the time that it takes to button a pair of shoes."

"Certainly *you* can accomplish more in a few brief minutes than any other person I ever met! My own experience with you proves that!" O'Reilly laughed. But the girl's face was drawn. He remembered hearing that she had been dangerously ill. He wished her to realize that he was ready to give sympathy as well as help. "I don't want to talk of myself, but of you. Tell me what you care to tell. You may trust me."

"You're sure?" insisted Clo. "I'm putting my life in your hands."

"I've just my word to give," O'Reilly answered. "Look me in the face and decide if it's worth taking."

Clo looked him in the face, and said, "Yes! I'll tell you everything. Please don't ask questions, or speak till I finish."

Since the moment when he had been surprised by her voice at the telephone, and she had claimed his help, O'Reilly had thought of fantastic things, but they were commonplace compared to the story she flung at his head. To make him understand, in ten minutes, why she had to be at Krantz's Keller meant that she must spring all her facts upon him. Already, without knowing how she had escaped at the Dietz, O'Reilly had formed the opinion that she was a girl, not in a thousand but in many thousands. Now, listening in silence, he heard her tell what she had found, and what she had done, in Peterson's room. She spoke in simple words. Yet O'Reilly saw the scene as if his eye were at a keyhole; saw the girl realize that she was in the presence of a man not only dead, but murdered; saw

the battle between horror and courage as she searched the room and the pockets of the corpse whose blood-stained clothing was still warm. He heard the bell of the telephone. He followed Clo into the room next door, and marvelled at the way in which she drew information from "Chuff." When the taxi slowed down in Fourteenth Street, she had but reached the point where she "made a dash for the street." O'Reilly's brain had been busy. He was ready to give the advice expected.

Clo was talking still, while he paid the chauffeur and sent him away. As they entered the restaurant below which lay Krantz's Keller, breathlessly she brought her story to an end. "There! You know all I know!"

While they went downstairs side by side, step by step, O'Reilly gazed at the girl's profile. "I'm going to fall in love with this strange child," he thought. "I'm in love with her already."

They penetrated the blue curtain of tobacco smoke which veiled the cellar restaurant. People of all sorts were sitting at small, uncovered wooden tables, which were painted green. There were long-haired foreigners; there were rich American Jews. There were girls who looked like "show girls" or chorus girls at least, companioned by fashionably dressed and silly-faced boys. And all the company drank wine from oddly shaped bottles, or beer out of stone or pewter "krugs." At the end of the long, narrow room stood two huge casks, one on either side of a small stage where three men in the costumes of Tyrolese peasants played a zither, a 'cello, and a violin, for a gaily dressed boy and girl to dance.

There were a number of tables still unoccupied, and of these a few were free. O'Reilly chose one close to the entrance. Seated there, he and Clo could see everybody who came in or went out. If they themselves wished to leave in a hurry it would be a convenient place.

Clo could not even pretend to eat. She asked for strong coffee, and not to be conspicuous O'Reilly ordered for himself beer, and food with an odd, Russian sounding name. Having thus bought their right to the table, he leaned across to the pale girl.

"The time's come when I can tell you what I think," he said. "First, what I think of you. You're the bravest person I ever met, and the most loyal. If the woman for whose sake you've done this is worthy of her friend, why, I'll be on her side from this night on."

"Thank you," said Clo, meekly. She was very tired, but vitality flowed through her newly at O'Reilly's words and look. "I don't deserve such a compliment, but she deserves everything. If I've behaved badly to you, it was for her."

"I know," said O'Reilly. "But you weren't precisely 'bad.' You were, on the whole, rather—wonderful. How did you get out of my room with the only door locked on the inside?"

"Oh!" the girl cried, surprised, "I thought you'd guess. I went along the stone ledge under the window of your bedroom till I came to an open window of a room in the next suite."

"I thought of that, when it was too late; but it seemed incredible."

"It wasn't as hard to do as I was afraid it would be," said Clo. "The other window was open, the curtain was blowing out. I caught hold of it, and got along somehow, through not looking down. Then in the room where I went in, there was a man. He was at the door, and I scared him popping in that way at the window, so he let me run past. That's all." Firmly the girl closed the subject.

"Let's talk about the pearls," she said. "Peterson was a wicked man. I can't pretend to be sorry he's been killed. He was acting for others higher up. I want to find Kit, not because I think she murdered him, but because I'm sure she's got the pearls. Who called out 'Come in!' in a man's voice, when Peterson was dead? We haven't got time to discuss the whole business before half-past eleven. Here comes my coffee! It's going to give me new life!"

"You must need it. Try to nibble a few crumbs of this rusk," O'Reilly advised. "I've been thinking hard since you told me how 'Chuff' 'phoned to 'Pete,' and took you for Kit. As for the voice that called 'Come in', the wall being thin, a man in the room close by might think the knock was at his door. You're almost surely right about Kit being in the hotel to watch Peterson. No doubt he was acting for men who have the power to—trouble Mrs. Sands. Don't look at me like a wild cat! I shan't tell what you don't want to hear, but there certainly are such men. Most likely Peterson followed us into the Sands' apartment without being noticed in the wild confusion of your fainting. He was there to get hold of the thing he was blackmailing her for, the thing you went back to my hotel to steal, and then repented stealing. Naturally Peterson didn't find it, as it was still in my safe at the Dietz, but he might have seen the pearls. The fellow must have been hiding close to Mrs. Sands and me, when we talked, or he wouldn't have known that John Heron had wanted to buy those pearls! He 'phoned, later, from

the Westmorland to Heron, as you must have guessed from what I 'phoned back. As for Kit, she was in her room next door when he called Heron up, and heard about his having pearls to sell; or else she went in to help him pack, and saw them. But it strikes me that a young woman of her class wouldn't bash a man on the head, and risk the Chair, for the righteous joy of turning a fortune over to her pals. No, if she killed Peterson, she killed him because she wanted the pearls for herself or a 'sweetheart.'"

"There's Churn," said Clo. "He and Kit may be a 'case.' She may have gone straight to him with the pearls."

"'Churn's' possibly a nickname for that Lorenz Czerny, whose name you found written on a visiting card," O'Reilly said. "What with that card, and the memorandum, and Kit's bag, we ought to get on to the track of the gang. I'm on Mrs. Sands' side now. But I know a private detective who's worked for clients of mine. He's close as an oyster, and true as a compass. Chuff may keep his appointment, or he may not. If the real Kit's turned up and told the truth, perhaps he won't dare, for fear of a trap. Still, he may, if he's got pluck, and a good disguise—or if the police have nothing 'on' him. The gang won't want the false Kit to get away with what she knows if the real one's true to them. And they'll be eager to see whom they're up against. That's why I should like to have Denham—the detective—on the spot."

"Would that be the best way to get the pearls?" asked Clo.

"Can you suggest a better one?"

"Not on the spur of the moment."

"It's on the spur of the moment we must decide."

"Well—'phone Denham."

"I will," said O'Reilly. "I think I ought to get him now unless he's on some job. I'll be back in a few minutes. There's no danger of serious trouble for you here."

"I'm used to taking care of myself," said Clo. The hot, strong coffee had brought a faint colour to her face, and she looked up with one of those "cheeky" grins of hers, such as his "cousin" had given him at the Dietz. O'Reilly went away bewitched with the creature, absorbed in her. She had done so much for the love of a woman. What would she do for love of a man?

He had to go upstairs to the telephone, it seemed, at Krantz's. Then the line was busy. He was obliged to wait.

Meanwhile a tall girl, in a bright pink cloak over a pink dress, hurried through the gloomy restaurant. She paused only to glance at a clock on the wall, and then ran downstairs to the "Keller."

# XXVI

## THE GIRL IN PINK

Clo sat watching the crowd. She had removed her veil, and the long, brown cloak lent by Beverley. The latter she had folded, and was sitting upon it.

It was then, when most of the tables were taken, and when a young tenor with a good voice had replaced the Italian peasants, that the girl in pink walked in. Clo sat with her face to the entrance, and happened to be looking that way. At sight of the girl, who came in alone, it was all she could do to sit still. She felt the blood stream to her face, and taking up the empty coffee cup, pretended to drink.

"Gracious, why did I never think of her!" she wondered. For this was the girl who had got out of the elevator at the Westmorland, and had been stared at by the men, when Clo and Beverley descended the stairs from Peterson's room. Would there have been time after they had turned their backs for Kit to get out of the brown trunk (if she'd been in it!), fasten the lid, and descend to the lift while the two women went down the six flights of stairs?

Yes, there would have been time. Clo was thankful that she had disposed of her veil, and was sitting on the cloak. Here at Krantz's she was only a girl in a white dress, with a brown toque which at the Westmorland had been hidden with a veil.

There were two or three tables still disengaged, but the one with the best view of the stage was the one nearest Clo. The girl in pink tripped to it, without hesitation, stood for a minute staring at the singer, and sat down. Clo watched her. She could not be certain, but she thought the girl had caught the eye of the singer and had made him a sign.

Not only had he a good voice, but he was good to look at, dark and rather "dashing," "almost like a second-hand gentleman," as Clo said to herself. His song pleased the audience, who clapped violently, demanding another. But the young man smiled, threw out his hands, shrugged, touched his throat, and bowed himself off the stage. By this time the girl in pink had ordered a bottle of wine which, to judge by the loving care of the waiter, must have been rare and expensive.

The singer sat down with his back to Clo, his companion at his side. Thus they were able to draw close, and talk without much fear of being overheard.

"Good Lord, Churn, I thought I'd missed you," were the first words Clo caught. As the girl spoke she flung a quick glance toward her little neighbour at the next table, but Clo had never looked so child-like. "I went to the Riche, and you'd gone," Kit continued. "To the Western; too late. Gosh! how I hiked for this place! I don't know what I'd done if I'd lost you!"

"Vot's de row?" Churn asked cheerfully, speaking with a slight and rather agreeable foreign accent. He poured himself a tumblerful of the deep-coloured red wine, and drank as if it were water.

"Say, Churn, a big thing's happened. I can't tell you here."

"You want I take you to de hotel?"

"No! I'm never goin' back there. And I can't go to my own digs either. I'll explain by and by. Could you take me home with you?"

"No, Jake'll be comin' in."

"Well, let's go to Chuff's. We must be somewhere! I've got a thing to show you, Churn. If there's two rooms free in the house we'll take 'em—or, no, better take one. You'll see why we must be together when you know. Say, here's money to pay the wine—looks better for you than me. Then we'll be off."

Clo gazed at the door. No O'Reilly yet. But if this pair went she would have to go, too. She mustn't lose them!

Churn beckoned a waiter with a ten-dollar bill thrust into his hand by Kit. The waiter came; but he had to get change. In Clo's lap, hidden under her napkin, was the bag she had found in Kit's room. Stealthily she opened it and took out a stub of pencil she had noticed among the contents. On the table lay a programme of the evening's entertainment. Neither she nor O'Reilly had glanced at it; but now the girl eagerly examined the list. Among the names was that of "Lorenz Czerny, Tenor"; and Clo underlined it with the pencil. Beneath, on the margin, she scrawled: "Kit's come and has been talking to him. They're going away. I must follow. I leave you all materials for the search—except the pearl. I keep that. Don't worry about me. I'll take care of myself."

Clo had plenty of money, supplied by Beverley, so a five-dollar bill was laid

conspicuously on the crumbs of rusk.

Kit and Churn were on their feet. The waiter had given change, and Churn was counting it out. Both stood with their backs to Clo. Clo slipped the programme into the bead bag and the bead bag into a pocket of Beverley's brown silk coat, on which she had been sitting. She then whisked the folded garment from her own chair on to O'Reilly's, and covered it with his napkin.

"I hope to goodness I'll meet him on the way up," she thought, "or before I get out of the restaurant above. I daren't take the cloak where she might see it. Besides, he must have the bag and memorandum."

Churn gave the waiter a fifty-cent piece, and followed Kit, who had started. Neither looked back; and Clo beckoned the waiter. "I've an engagement," she said, "and can't wait longer for the gentleman I came with. He's upstairs telephoning. You tell him I've paid. Never mind the change. I'm leaving my coat for the gentleman to bring home. Can I trust you to be sure and give it to him?"

"You can, miss," said the man. "I'll take charge of it myself."

He looked trustworthy as well as grateful. Kit and Churn were winding their way among the tables. Clo pushed after them. O'Reilly was not on the stairs, nor was he visible in the dull restaurant above. He had the all-important envelope, it was true, and she could not guess who had returned it in a way to make him suppose it came from her. O'Reilly was, however, an honourable man, and he had promised to be "on Mrs. Sands' side." In the circumstances she saw only one course, and regretfully, even fearfully, took it. When Kit and Churn walked out into the street she walked after them, a few paces behind.

Clo had been gone precisely four minutes when O'Reilly tore downstairs burning to apologize and explain. Mrs. Denham had said that her husband was out, but she knew where he was, and would 'phone; if he—O'Reilly—would hold the line she'd have an answer "in no time." Presently he had been rewarded by "getting" Denham, who, on hearing that he was urgently wanted, promised to cut short some work he was doing late at the office, and taxi to Krantz's. This was good news, and O'Reilly was sure Clo would think it had been worth waiting for. He could not believe his eyes when he saw the deserted table. What could have happened to the girl?

He stood forlornly for a moment, staring round the room. As his eyes searched vainly, the waiter who had served him came hurrying up.

"The young lady's gone, sare. She had to go—very sorry. She left me dis to give you when you come back. She pay de bill, sare, but I keep de table for you. You not finish your supper."

O'Reilly had a stab of violent resentment against Clo. But the thought had only to pass through his brain to be rejected. The girl was a strange girl, audacious and unscrupulous in her loyalty to Mrs. Sands; but she could not have told her story in a way to impress its truth upon him unless she had been sincere.

"The young lady didn't give you any other message?" he asked.

"No, sare. She was in much hurry. But I see her mark on a piece of paper," the waiter replied. "Maybe she write you a note."

O'Reilly reflected. Which should he do, look for a message in the pocket of the coat Clo had left, or dash upstairs and find out which way she had gone? It was almost certain that he would now gain nothing by the latter course.

O'Reilly sat down at the table, in the chair where he had sat before. He found the one pocket in the brown coat, and in that pocket Kit's jet and steel bag. There was nothing else there, so he opened the bag cautiously in case some of Kit's friends had arrived. As he did so, the folded programme dropped out.

# XXVII

## WHEN BEVERLEY CAME HOME

When Clo had shut the taxi door almost in Beverley's face, and had given the chauffeur orders to drive on, she had said to herself, "Angel will be so surprised she won't know what to do for a minute. And by the time she pulls herself together, she'll realize it's too late to stop me."

The girl had judged well. Beverley shrank back from the slammed door with a jump of the nerves. Then she guessed what Clo meant to do. She was in the act of tapping to stop the chauffeur, and tell him to turn, when the question seemed to ask itself aloud in her brain, "What good will it do for you to go back?"

Before she could reach Clo, if she returned to the hotel now, the girl would have learned the secret of Peterson's room. When she saw what Beverley had seen, she would know that there was nothing to be done with a dead man. She would slip away to avoid being mixed up in the business of the murder. She would not risk being caught. The girl was too sensible, and she had plenty of money as well as brains. She had shown herself equal to desperate emergencies. She would be equal to this. She was so quick-witted that she would know what to do, and how to do it. Beverley let the chauffeur drive on. He went to the corner where he had been hailed by his two passengers. There he stopped, and Beverley got out. She paid him; and making a pretence of examining her change in the light of a street lamp, stood still until the taxi had turned and shot out of sight. Then, with the bag of jewels which Clo had tossed into her lap, she walked home. Her latch-key opened the door of the flat, she entered her boudoir, and fell into a chair, sitting as still as the dead Peterson had sat. It was not much past ten o'clock.

Five minutes later she took off hat and cloak, and peeped into her bedroom to see if her maid were there. But the room was empty, and she put away the gray mantle and toque where she had found them. She did not forget to toss carelessly upon her bed the hat she had worn in the afternoon, and a pair of white gloves; then she rang for her maid who came almost at once. She had gone out, Beverley explained quietly, to help Miss Riley transact a little matter of business.

It was eleven-thirty when Léontine bade her mistress good-night and softly

closed the bedroom door. She had noticed nothing strange in the manner of Madame, except an unusual lack of vitality.

Left alone, Beverley opened the door of the big, bare room. "Clo," she called softly.

No answer. She switched on the light. No one was there, and Beverley hurried on to the little room beyond, which had been Sister Lake's. It, too, was empty. Something grave, perhaps terrible, had detained the girl.

"She won't come—she won't come at all." Beverley said aloud. "What shall I do?" She could not abandon the fragile child who loved her, who had stood by her with wonderful strength and courage throughout this dreadful day. Yet what was there she could do?

Roger returned about one o'clock. He moved quietly, as if in order not to disturb his wife, but she heard the cautious closing of his door. She did not try or wish to sleep, but lay on her bed, waiting for day.

After six o'clock Beverley could lie still no longer. She stole into her bathroom, and bathed in cold water. But she felt as utterly spent after her bath as before.

This morning she did penance by putting on a tailor-made, white linen suit, of a slightly severe cut, and made her toilet without ringing for Léontine. She decided to breakfast at the customary hour and in the customary place, but she did not expect to be joined by Roger. She was still in her bedroom, fastening a brooch, when he tapped at her door.

"Come in!" she cried, eager for the meeting, yet sick with fear. Roger came in, fully dressed, looking cool and well groomed. To Beverley's sad heart it seemed that he had never been so handsome—or so hard.

"Good morning," he said, as he might have spoken to any friend. "I heard you stirring about, so I thought I might knock. Are you going out early?" as his eyes wandered over her dress.

"You mean because I'm dressed? No, I didn't think of it. I couldn't sleep. The night was hot, and the heat was on my nerves, I suppose, so I got up at six. I hope I didn't disturb you, Roger?"

"Not at all," he politely replied. "I've some business which will take me out half an hour sooner than usual. I suppose they can give us breakfast in time for that?

Coffee and toast and grape fruit can't take long to make ready?"

"I'll ring for breakfast. I didn't know if——"

"Didn't know—what?" he caught up her sentence as it broke.

"Oh, nothing—important," she excused herself. Yet she was sure he knew what had stopped her short of saying that she didn't know if he would breakfast with her in the boudoir.

"Well, I daresay Johnson has put the newspapers in their place by this time," Roger said, ignoring her embarrassment. "I'll have a look, to save time. You'll come when you're ready? I've a suggestion to make that I think you'll like."

He spoke pleasantly, not at all as if he had a grudge against his wife. Many women would have been satisfied with such a manner; but Beverley was not of the "many women," and Roger had never been like other, ordinary husbands. For the first morning since that day in Chicago when he had asked her to be his wife, they had not kissed.

"It will always be like this from now on," she told herself. "I hope I shall die. I can't live without his love, and go on seeing him every day!"

Roger had not mentioned Clo, and Beverley held her peace. She thought it would be best to wait and see what the newspapers said. At the end of ten minutes, as the breakfast tray was being placed on the lace table cover, she strolled into the boudoir. Roger hardly looked up, feigning to be deeply interested in his paper. On other mornings—the servant being out of the room—he would have sprung from his chair to place hers, and perhaps to kiss the long braid of her golden brown hair, or the back of her white neck as it showed under her fetching little cap.

"Any exciting news?" she asked in a casual tone, as she sat down—the sort of tone which other wives perhaps use to other husbands.

"Nothing that interests us specially," Roger answered. "A rather sordid murder, at a third-rate hotel; there's a mystery, of course."

"What hotel?" Beverley ventured to ask, pouring coffee with a hand that would shake.

"One I never heard of before. Let me see, what's the name? Oh, the

'Westmorland.' You'll not be interested. Let's get to the thing I want to talk about. Can you guess what it is?"

Beverley shook her head. "I am a bad guesser."

"It's partly about your pearls. By the by, was the pearl-stringer satisfactory?"

"Oh, quite," Beverley murmured, sipping her coffee.

"I'm glad she made a good job. The rope looks as fine as if no accident had happened, I suppose?"

"It's a—wonderful rope," his wife managed to reply.

"I imagined you'd be wearing your gewgaws for breakfast this morning just to show they were all right!" Roger's eyes smiled coolly into hers. It was a cruel smile.

"A rope of pearls at breakfast—on a tailor gown of linen—and a queen's pearls at that! What bad taste! I shall wear these splendours only on the greatest occasions."

"Well, I've arranged a great occasion," said Roger. "That's principally what I want to talk about. I'd like you to send out invitations for a house party and a big dinner and dance directly after we're settled in the Newport cottage. And I'd like to move there sooner than we meant. I've decided to take a few weeks' holiday. We'll both be better out of the city."

"Oh, yes!" Beverley agreed.

"And I want you to do a thing to please me. Wear the queen's pearls—your pearls—on the night of the dinner and dance."

# XXVIII

## MR. JONES OF PEORIA

O'Reilly had only just finished reading Clo's note, had folded it up, and put it in his pocket when he was joined by a man at whom, for a second, he stared as at a stranger. Then a slight contraction of the newcomer's eyelid and a twinkle in his eye enlightened Justin.

"Well, this is good, meeting you!" exploded a jolly voice. "I hoped you hadn't forgotten poor old Dick Jones, though it's a long time since you blew out our way to Peoria. I'm here in little old New York, seeing the sights."

"Why, of course, I remember you very well, Mr. Jones," said O'Reilly. "Sit down at my table, do. What'll you have, in memory of old times?"

As he spoke, he took in the extraordinary changes Mr. William J. Denham had made in his personal appearance. Denham was a slender, youngish man, neat and dapper, with light brown hair, a smooth face, and pale skin. Jones had reddish, rumpled eye-brows, puffy pink lids, and large, roving eyes behind convex glasses. His hair was also red and rumpled, and though he was not enormously stout, he was clumsily built, with a decided paunch.

When he had sat down at O'Reilly's table, the absence of near neighbours and the momentary inattention of waiters gave the two men a chance to speak freely. "You sent a hurry call. Something up at Krantz's this peaceful Sabbath?"

"There's more up than I want to come out," said O'Reilly. "Things have changed since I 'phoned, but there's more need of you than ever. The girl I wanted to help was with me. While I talked to you, she disappeared...."

"Disappeared!"

"Yes. I couldn't follow, because when I knew what had happened it was too late to get on her track; otherwise you'd have found me flown. I'd have sacrificed you for her, if there'd been even a sporting chance. But I didn't see one. Maybe you will, when I put you wise: or somebody may show up whose face will give you a tip. I'll tell you what I know—except the name of a lady which mustn't come into

the business even with discretion incarnate like you."

"Reservations often spoil jobs," said Denham.

"Mine won't."

The coming of a waiter broke the conversation.

"Anybody interesting here?" asked Justin, when the waiter had gone.

"No familiar faces. But there may be, later."

O'Reilly shook his head. "It's a quarter to twelve. The man or men who made an appointment—not with me; with the girl who's gone—should have turned up at eleven-thirty."

"If they're sure of themselves—sure their faces aren't known—they're probably here," remarked Denham. "But out with your story. A lot may hang on that."

"A lot does," said O'Reilly; and told it. He omitted no detail given by Clo except such as led too close to Mrs. Sands. O'Reilly hardly disguised the fact that the crime and its punishment were of slight importance to him compared with the finding of Clo Riley. "I don't want her mixed up in this murder business," he finished, "and she doesn't want to be mixed up in it, not for her own sake, but because of the woman she's protecting. You could get the name of that woman, but I ask you not to concern yourself with it."

"Right you are," Denham reassured him. "I've got enough to do without meddling in other folks' business. The lady outside the case doesn't exist. But as for 'Churn' being Lorenz Czerny, it doesn't go without saying that we shall spot Chuff and Jake, and the rest of the gang through him. That will depend on himself, and his Moll—Kit. I wouldn't mind offering your young lady a good place and good pay when this mix-up comes to an end."

"I do not believe she'll be looking for work," said O'Reilly.

"This Kit must be pretty sharp, too. It looks as if Churn was her 'steady.' If she did the job at the Westmorland, it was to set him and her up in housekeeping, later on, well away from Chuff and Co. Looks as if Kit had been used for a catspaw, and maybe hadn't got enough out of the job for herself. Suddenly she saw a whole dazzling lot. I can't get on to who this Kit is yet. But maybe I will. Your little friend does shoot quick—and low."

"She does," said O'Reilly. "But she doesn't hit below the belt."

"Folks like Kit and Churn and Chuff haven't got belts," said Denham.

O'Reilly laughed again. But he wanted Clo. She was made for him—the demon, the darling, the only girl he had ever seriously desired. He hadn't known that she existed till to-night, when she'd begun their acquaintance by tricking and stealing from him. Though he might laugh, he wouldn't know a happy moment till she was safe. For an instant he forgot Denham and the business in hand. "I think she likes me," he told himself. "I'll make her like me a lot more when I get half a chance."

"That couple will hide," Denham was saying. "Churn may send word to Krantz that he can't sing; he'll say he's sick. But I shan't do any such thing as put Krantz wise that his tenor is wanted. Krantz is a fox. Our hope is in Miss Riley."

"You'll come to the Dietz, won't you?" asked O'Reilly.

"Yes," said the detective, finishing his cool beer. "I'll come. But I haven't got much hope from what may be in that bead bag. People who have things to hide, hide 'em better than in bags. However, we'll see." When Justin had paid for Denham's drink, they went, with the bead bag in the pocket of Clo's brown cloak hanging over O'Reilly's arm. It was after midnight.

# XXIX

## ACCORDING TO THE MORNING PAPERS

Roger had talked of nothing but his plan for the Newport house-warming, after starting the subject; and he had told Beverley that they ought to be able to move in a week. She must make everything right about the servants: he would see to outside arrangements. And this "big party" could take place in a fortnight. It was ostentatious sending out invitations longer in advance. They must make a "splash"—worthy of the house—and the pearls. Beverley must think up something original in the way of entertainment—a surprise. And as he talked it seemed to the girl that his eyes never left her face. Beverley promised to move to Newport when Roger wished. She promised to write the invitations, and—she promised to wear the queen's pearls.

At last Roger went, without having alluded to Clodagh Riley. Whether this were deliberate, or careless, Beverley could not guess. But she was thankful.

The instant Roger had gone Beverley seized the paper he had dropped, and found what she wanted. "Mysterious Murder at Hotel Westmorland" was the heading at the top of a column on the first page. She sat down and read the whole report.

That day was among the most terrible of Beverley's chequered life. She had had several engagements, but she telephoned to put them off. Not for anything would she have left the house, for she hoped to have a message from Clo. She feared to hear also from one whom Peterson served, but it was best that she should be at home if such a message arrived.

"Have they kept their word? Have they killed Stephen because I didn't send back the papers?" she constantly asked herself. "What will they do next? Will they advertise again in the newspapers? Will they telephone? Will they send another man, now Peterson is dead? Or if not, how will they reach me? Surely they won't leave me in peace for long!"

The day passed with outward monotony. It was only within herself that each moment was different from every other.

When evening came at last, nothing had happened, yet Beverley's nerves were jarred as if by a succession of shocks. As Léontine dressed her for dinner, a sharp tap at the door made her jump and cry out. "A special-delivery letter for me, Madame," announced the Frenchwoman. "Have I Madame's permission? It is strange I do not know the hand. It is but a common yellow envelope, addressed in pencil, to Mademoiselle Léontine Rossignol—perhaps from someone who begs. Never have I received a letter by special delivery!"

"You'd better open it," said Beverley, relieved that the letter was not for her.

"Rossignol is so odd a name, Madame, that everyone remembers, because it means nightingale," said Léontine, gingerly tearing off an end of the flimsy yellow envelope.

Then, suddenly she cried out. "But Madame, the letter is from Mademoiselle Riley! I do not see why she writes to me. I understand nothing of what she says. Will Madame read?"

Hiding eagerness, Beverley took the half sheet of commercial paper.

The letter began:

> DEAR LÉONTINE:
>
> I am safe in my new home, and there's no need to worry. I am picking up all that I have lost. I hope to call on you before long and show what good progress I have made. With grateful messages for Madame, from her devoted little servant, and kind remembrance to you—I am, faithfully yours,
>
> Clodagh Riley.
>
> P.S.—If possible I should like Mr. O'R. to hear that I am doing well. He has been kind since you saw me last.

There was no date and no address on this letter, which filled only one page.

Beverley's bewilderment passed as she studied the letter. Clo's underlying motives came to the surface with a flash.

"I suppose," she explained quietly, "that Mademoiselle fancied it would be a liberty to write to me. I'm glad to hear from her so soon. As the letter is really for me, perhaps I'd better keep it."

"Please do, madame," Léontine urged, again attacking the tiny hooks which fastened her mistress's dinner dress. "I noticed that Mademoiselle did not put the number of the house or street where she is staying. But, of course, Madame will know both."

"Of course," echoed Beverley. She guessed that Léontine must be consumed with curiosity as to Clo's disappearance and the departure of Sister Lake.

When Léontine had hooked the last hook Beverley went to the boudoir. There she sat down with Clo's cryptic message, praying that Roger might not come till she had unravelled it.

But, after all, the meaning of one sentence after another sprang quickly to her eyes. She had realized at once that Clo wrote to Léontine because she dared not use the name of Mrs. Sands. This suggested that she was in a house where the name of Sands was not unknown. Now, concentrating upon the queer letter, Beverley understood each veiled hint. Clo wished her not to "worry." Clo was "picking up all she had lost." Clo "hoped to call before long, and show what good progress" she had made. All this could have only one meaning. And how like Clo, to have treasured in some brain-cell Léontine's queer name of "Rossignol"!

She had written nothing to waken suspicion; and as no house, no street, was mentioned, there need be no dread of discovery for guilty consciences. Beverley judged that O'Reilly's name as well as Roger's might be known to someone near to Clo. Evidently she was afraid to send a letter to Justin O'Reilly. But the end of the postscript was amazing. O'Reilly had been kind to Clo!

"She went to see him again!" was the thought in Beverley's mind. "Then, perhaps, she didn't go back to the Westmorland. What can 'kind' mean, unless he's promised to help instead of hurt us?"

But she must find out what had happened last between O'Reilly and Clo. How should she communicate with him? Should she send a note by district messenger to the Dietz? Or—should she telephone, before Roger came, and learn all that she wished to know without delay? Quickly she decided upon this bolder course. She called up O'Reilly's hotel, and soon heard his "Hello!"

"I'm Mrs. Sands," she explained. "I've a letter from Clo. She sends you a message."

The voice from the Dietz had sounded indifferent. It was so no longer.

"What news?" O'Reilly asked. "Tell me everything."

She told him, and read Clo's letter to Léontine distinctly, that he might miss no word. "I understand why it might be dangerous to put an address, or to write to you or me," Beverley added. "But it's frightful not to know where she is. Explain what you can quickly, because—I'm expecting someone."

"Peterson stole your pearls," O'Reilly answered. "He 'phoned Heron and offered to sell them. He must have been hiding in your room and overheard our talk. Later, I answered him for Heron. Miss Riley was in Peterson's room then, and she and I got in touch. She asked through the 'phone if I'd help. I said 'Yes,' and she told me to come with a taxi. I picked her up outside the hotel, and took her where she wanted to go: a restaurant, Krantz's Keller. When I'd heard what she had to say I proposed to employ a private detective. Don't worry; he's absolutely loyal, and I'm on your side, after all, Mrs. Sands—I may as well confess it's for Miss Riley's sake. She repented stealing the papers from me, you know, and sent them back in the envelope just as they were——"

"Clo sent you the papers! You're mistaken. I know she didn't send them," Beverley cried. She had forgotten her fear of being overheard, forgotten everything, but the sound of a door closing caused her to start. It was a strange sound just then, because both doors had already been shut when she went to the telephone, the door leading into her bedroom, the door into the hall, and she had heard neither open since. Yet she could not be mistaken. Somebody had closed one of those doors and must previously have opened it.

Sick with fear, Beverley dropped the receiver and ran to look into the hall. No one was there. She flew to the door of her bedroom and peeped in. The room was empty. She rang for Johnson, who appeared at once.

"Has Mr. Sands come in?" she asked.

"I think not, Madam," the butler replied.

"Go and see. Search everywhere."

She did not move while the man was away.

"Mr. Sands is not in the house, Madam," Johnson solemnly announced.

"Thank you!" Beverley said. Yet she was not relieved. Something told her that it was Roger who had shut the door.

# XXX

## WHAT CLO DID WITH A KNIFE

When Kit and Churn left Krantz's Keller they walked fast along Fourteenth Street till they came to Sixth Avenue. There they appeared to hesitate, as if they could not decide whether to go up or down town. Clo, as close behind them as she dared to venture, guessed instantly that, until now, they had not entirely made up their minds which of several hiding-places it would be safest for them to seek.

Judging by their linked arms, and the nearness of the two heads, their conversation was absorbing. They stopped at the corner, and Clo stopped also. Presently the pair resolved on going down toward Thirteenth Street. Clo went after them. They walked for several blocks; and the girl following always glanced at the number of each street she passed. There had been an accident to a taxi, however, in the neighbourhood of Eleventh Street, and a crowd had collected. In this crowd Clo nearly lost the quarry. She had a moment of despair, then saw the skirt of Kit in the distance. No longer was she wearing a pink cloak, but a white one. She must have had a chance to turn it wrong side out!

So excited was Clo that she forgot to notice the streets. Whether the couple turned off the Avenue into Tenth, or Ninth, or Eighth, she was not sure. She was certain only that she was on their track. Then followed a chase across town. In this, the girl finally lost her head a little, but when it seemed that she could drag herself no further, Kit and Churn stopped in front of a house, and rang the bell.

"Neither of them lives there, or there'd be a latch-key!" Clo thought, hovering on the other side of the street.

It was some time before the two were let in; but after a delay of four or five minutes a woman opened the door. A dim gas light shone from the hall or lobby, and Clo's impression was of a dark brown face, the face of a negress. There was a short discussion; then the woman nodded, stepping aside to let Kit and Churn pass. An instant later the door shut them in.

Clo stood gazing at the house. It was one in a row of old-fashioned, shabby brick buildings, four storeys in height. A light showed in the basement, but other

windows were black. Suddenly, as Clo watched, a yellow gleam flashed in a fourth-storey room but at the same moment a man stepped to the window and pulled down a dark blind. Clo thought that this man was Churn.

"They're going to stay," she argued; and crossing the street at a distance from the house, the girl looked at it with interest. There was no street lamp near, and she could not see the number; but there was a small plaque at the side of the door, and Clo tripped up the steps to read it. Joy, the place was a boarding house!

The pair having mounted to the fourth storey, Clo thought she might venture to ring. She pulled an old-fashioned bell, and her heart thumped in her breast as the shrill sound jingled through the house.

"I must have some tale to tell—why I'm here so late, wanting a room," she reflected.

The door was opened by the woman who had admitted Kit and Churn. Not only was she black, but she was fat and slovenly. Staring at the new-comer, she exclaimed with a mouth full of gum:

"Say, is you another fren' o' Mr. Cheffinsky?"

"Chuff!" was the password that flashed through Clo's brain. "This is where he lives!" She was triumphant.

"I don't know anything about Mr. Cheffinsky," she replied, "but I'm in a scrape, and a friend of mine once recommended me to this house. I saw some people come in, and a light. It's still a boarding-house, isn't it?"

"It ain't no foundlin' orphant asylum."

"I don't ask for charity. I've got money to pay my board. But I don't want an expensive room. One at the top of the house will do."

"Say, it's a real funny time o' night for a young girl like you to go lookin' foh a home to lay her haid," remarked the negress. "But you can step in the hall. I'll call Mis' MacMahon. She's the lady o' the house. We've got a room upstahs, but I don't know whethah she'll let you have it."

She allowed Clo to enter, and left the girl standing as she descended the basement stairs.

"'MacMahon' sounds hopeful!" Clo thought. The girl had lodged drearily in New

York, but she had never been in a house as dreary as this.

Mrs. MacMahon's look was less inspiring than her name. She was of the big-jowled type; a grim woman of middle age; and her manner suggested suspicion. But Clo began to speak first, with her best brogue, which she could use, when needed, with great effect.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am, for intruding on ye at this time of the night," said the girl in her creamiest voice, with a child-like smile, "but the lady I'm maid for and me had a quarrel about a young man, and rather than give him up, I just walked away from the house, without waitin' to pack my things. I've walked till I'm played out! I tould yer maid a friend o' mine had spoken o' Mrs. MacMahon's place and I didn't forget. I'll pay a week in advance if you'll take me in."

Whether Mrs. MacMahon believed these out-pourings was an open question, but her face softened slightly at sound of the brogue.

"Irish, are you!" she said.

"Yes, County Cork, and not over since very long," returned the girl.

"I'm from County Cork, me and me dead husband both," volunteered the woman. "I've been in New York these twelve years. Violet says you ast for a top-floor room?"

"I did that," said Clo.

"Well, a top-floor room is the only wan I've got vacant. How long would ye be wanting it for?"

"Oh, a few days, and maybe more."

"You can come and have a look. I don't boast of the room. It's last choice. I charge seven dollars with board."

"I don't mind seven dollars," said Clo, and followed her hostess up flight after flight of dimly lighted stairs. They were covered with oilcloth, and the hall smelled of escaping gas, but the girl was almost happy. The place was not attractive, but it seemed decent enough.

"It's a hall room, but a front one," explained Mrs. MacMahon, panting, as they reached the top of the house. Clo was enchanted to hear this, for it meant that the room must adjoin the one where Churn had pulled down the blind. She

wondered if Churn were married to Kit. Perhaps she would find out by and by.

"There's a husband and wife come into the double room next," Mrs. MacMahon went on, when she had shown Clo her proposed quarters. "The wall's kind of thin, for this room was part of the other once, but they're a quiet couple, I guess: and if you're quiet, too, you won't trouble each other. They're friends of a gentleman boarder we've had for some time, and they've been here to call on him, though they've never stayed before. I want 'em to be comfortable, so stir around as little as you can in the morning. I guess they're the kind that lies late in bed."

"I feel more as if I'd like to lie in bed all day!" sighed Clo.

"Well, sleep as much as you like. But don't be scared if ye hear folks movin' later on to-night. The friend of this couple is out, but he may come home and want to see 'em."

Clo paid seven dollars in advance for the room, and took pains to show that she had plenty of money. She begged also to buy or borrow a clean nightgown, and suggested that, if there were a new toothbrush in the house, she would be glad to have it. Mrs. MacMahon laughed. A nightgown she could lend, but as for a toothbrush, there wouldn't be one this side of the nearest drugstore. Miss Ryan (the name Clo gave) must wait till next day.

"Well, anyhow, maybe you've a bit you'll give me to eat!" the new boarder pleaded. "I'm that hungry I could bite off the door-knob! I'll pay extra, of course—this time of night. And your coloured woman—Violet, isn't she?—shall have a couple of dimes for bringing up the food."

Mrs. MacMahon softened and asked what food her guest desired. Clo desired nothing so much as a knife, and made a bid to secure one by asking for meat. "Any old kind!—and some bread and milk. I'll give fifty cents—" (she watched the woman's eye)—"I mean, a dollar for my supper."

When Mrs. MacMahon had gone the girl held her breath to listen. Yes, the wall was thin! She could hear Kit and Churn talking in an ordinary tone, but she could catch few words, even when she laid her ear against the dusty paper. When the voices sank low, they reached her only in an indistinct rumble.

She guessed that the tiny room was separated from the larger one by a partition of laths and plaster, covered on each side with flimsy wall paper. She could feel

as well as hear someone walking up and down, up and down, in the next room! No doubt it was Churn. Now and then he would pause. A piece of furniture would creak; then he would jump up, to begin walking again.

Presently Violet appeared, a coarse nightgown hanging over her arm, a plate of bread and ham on a napkinless tray, and glass of bluish milk. Clo gave the woman twenty cents, and promised the same sum if her breakfast were brought upstairs. Violet agreed to this bargain, which was well for the girl. She would have starved rather than desert her room long enough to eat while Churn and Kit remained in their quarters. She surmised that they would not often go out.

Clo had told the truth in pleading hunger, but when she was alone and had locked her door, she took from the tray only the steel knife and fork which lay beside the plate. Having pushed the cot bed away from the wall, she sat down on the floor, Turk fashion. Choosing a spot which would be invisible with the bed in place, she waited till Churn was inclined to walk. Then she began delicately to dig at the plaster with her extemporized tools. Whenever Churn stopped, she stopped also, lest the rat-like noise should reach alert ears in the next room. For a long time she toiled, cautiously, slowly, gathering up bits of paper and plaster that fell, and collecting them in her lap. It was a tedious task, but not difficult. In less than an hour she had made—practically without noise—a hole the size of a silver dollar. It went through to the lathes; beyond that barrier her tools were of no avail. She needed a thin, sharp instrument like a hat-pin, to push between the slats of wood. A tiny hole would suffice. But she had no hat-pin in the close-fitting toque lent by Beverley. Her own was now a souvenir in O'Reilly's possession.

She tried hair-pins, but they bent, one after another. Then she searched for a nail, and found one at last, stuck in the wall, supporting a small mirror. Carefully she deposited this upon the bed (it wouldn't do to break a looking glass!) and set to work once more. At the end of twenty minutes' scratching, she felt resistance cease before the nail-point. Hastily she withdrew it, lest it should pierce too far; and stretched on the floor she listened with her ear to the aperture on her side of the wall.

# XXXI

## THE NINE DAYS

"I wish Chuff would come, and get it over!" she heard Churn sigh aloud, in his sweet, foreign-sounding voice.

"I wonder why he went out?" said Kit. "He ought to have been home all evening. He was expecting Pete on business, you know."

"Can he have got onto de reason dat fellah Pete didn't come?"

"No, no," Kit answered. "I've told you a dozen times no! He wouldn't have gone to the Westmorland. Pete had to call on him. But there must have been something important to take Chuff out."

"Vat vas de plan?"

"Oh, what does it matter? To-night's changed everything for me, and you, too. You are goin' to stand by me, aren't you, Churn, through thick and thin?"

"You bettcha life! For de whole of vot I'm vorth!"

Kit's tone changed. She chuckled. "You may be worth a lot. You've married a rich heiress. See?"

"Sh, girl! If Chuff comes spyin' on us we don't vant him to hear dat word 'married.' He'd only laugh—or vorse."

"All right! But he ain't our master any more. We can do without him."

"Maybe he von't tink he can do vidout us."

"He'll *have* to, when we get something good on the pearls. And say, I never thought you could kill any one and feel no more than I do now. Churn, if you'd been there, you'd 'a' settled his hash long before I did. The things he said to me—and me your wife! It makes me sick to think o' them—and of him, the low beast!"

"Don't tink, den. Tink of me."

"I do. I love you, Boy! The minute I lamped the pearls—when I sensed they was real—I meant to get 'em, for you and me to set up house far away somewheres on our own. We can go to Buenos Aires or some place south, where they love a nice voice like yours, so you won't feel wasted. If Chuff knew what we've got here in this table drawer!"

"Better tie 'em up in your handkerchief again. If Chuff——"

"Oh, Chuff nothing! I feel in my bones, now he's so late, he won't come home to-night. I don't care what happens to Chuff. Let's go to bed."

"No—not yet. I vait."

"Peterson thought he could say what he liked to me, the pig!" Kit went on. "Well, he's paid. His blood's on his own head. Oh, Churn, it was on his head, every sense o' the word! I didn't like the look of it—turned me sick! Lucky my long cloak was in the room. See—on my dress, two stains! Boy, that trunk stunt was awful. You've got to let me go to bed and sleep, or I believe I'll have hysterics and yell the house down. I thought I was all right since I found you, but it's comin' on again, that tremblin'!"

"Go to bed, den, girl. I vait. Dat's easy."

"I will. Just one more look at the pearls—our pearls! But I lost one. I heard it roll. It was so close to him I—I couldn't——"

"Don't you care. Dere's a lot for us. We'll count 'em first ting to-morra', ven ve both feel like ourselves."

"They ought to fetch a king's ransom, Boy."

"Dey vill not, den. Dere'll be all de bulls in N'York after em. Joke on us, dough, if Chuff was in de deal mit Pete!"

"I'm sure he wasn't—dead sure."

Silence fell. When the pair spoke again it was of other things. At last Clo fell suddenly fast asleep, on the floor. She knew that Beverley's pearls were in the next room. That had to be enough for the night.

The girl slept till dawn. Waking, she was astonished to find herself on the floor, and for an instant could not remember what had happened. But in a flash it all came back. Quickly she got up and quietly undressed, putting on Mrs. MacMahon's immense nightgown before she dropped thankfully upon the cot bed. Clo did not sleep again, but lay until eight o'clock, when her neighbours began to stir. Then she listened once more at the hole in the wall until she feared that Violet might come with breakfast. The woman had suggested bringing it at nine, and lest she should wonder why the hungry girl hadn't supped, the milk had to be hastily poured away and the bread and ham hidden. The bed had also to be lifted into place covering the hole in the wall.

Nothing of special interest had been said by Kit and her husband since their waking, but soon the young woman began to concern herself with the subject of clothes.

"I told Mrs. MacMahon we expected our baggage this morning from Brooklyn. If it doesn't come it's been stolen—see? The old party won't think wrong of Chuff's pals. He's a real family friend. Gee, all sorts of things happen in a house like this! Before long we'll 'phone Isaacs to come along and look at the pearls. Chuff's got a 'phone in his room, you know."

Clo knew also. She had good reason to know, and that Chuff had lent his telephone book to "Jake."

As Violet kicked on the door (her hands being occupied with the tray) Clo hastily stuffed a handkerchief into the hole she had made in the wall. She feared that the pair in the next room might take alarm at the sound of voices, and therefore she cautiously subdued her own. She hadn't slept well, she answered Violet's question. Her head ached, and perhaps she might lie in bed the rest of the day. The promised reward was given, and more offered if Violet would find time to buy toilet articles, and a few clothes. She was begged to bring writing paper also; there might be a letter to send by express delivery.

The coffee, though weak, was hot, and Clo felt revived after drinking it. Once more she placed the bed across the door, pulled out the handkerchief "gag" from the hole in the wall, and thus, on sentinel duty, finished her breakfast.

Later in the day the couple next door resigned themselves to the indefinite absence of Chuff. "Mrs. Mac" herself came up to see her guests, who called themselves Mr. and Mrs. Stahl. The landlady talked of Mr. Cheffinsky as her "star boarder," and said that she was used to his "queer ways." Often he stopped

away from home a day or two, but she never worried. He always came back. The "Stahls" were voluble over the non-arrival of their luggage, which seemed to vex them more than the appearance of Cheffinsky, their old friend. Whether or not Mrs. MacMahon believed the story, at all events she agreed to supply the needs of Mr. and Mrs. Stahl, ordering a list of things for their selection. This arrangement raised Clo's hopes. Maybe Churn and Kit intended to venture out! If they went for a short airing, they would probably leave the pearls at home. In their absence Clo would somehow get into the room next door. With Beverley's jewels recaptured, her mission in this house would be accomplished.

But she was doomed to disappointment. After writing her hopeful letter to Léontine, Clo's expectations of quick success were dashed. Kit and Churn received the clothes they wanted, but did not go out; nor did they audibly plan to go. Their intention was to eat downstairs, but they would take turns. One would always keep guard over the pearls. Newspaper mention of the "girl in pink" had scared them. After a heated argument they decided that, till they "saw how the wind blew," they would not risk sending for Isaacs. This was a sacrifice, because they wished to dispose of the pearls before Cheffinsky came "nosing around"; but they were not sure of Isaac's loyalty. Who could tell what he might do, if tempted by big bribes to "frame" his pals? They must wait; and so must Clo.

Days passed. The girl still posed as an invalid taking a rest-cure, and her tips to Violet were generous. Once she heard Kit inquiring who lived in the next room; but Mrs. Mac's answer was satisfactory. A poor little mite of a thing, out of a job as lady's maid, was their neighbour; Irish, and recommended by an old client.

Nine days lagged on, and then at last Clo came upon a "personal" in the newspaper she took in. Instantly she realized that it was meant for her, and put in by Justin O'Reilly. It was so worded that no "outsider" could guess its meaning. "C.R. from her cousin who is just in," was the heading which caught her eye. He knew that she knew his name was Justin; and she had first introduced herself as his cousin! "Working out Sunday's problem with expert help," she read, "Message received insufficient. Won't you let me know where you are?"

The girl dared not answer by letter or newspaper. Violet would undertake any errand, but she could not be trusted for a mission of such importance. O'Reilly must be content with the message passed on by Mrs. Sands.

On the ninth day Kit and Churn had a serious quarrel. The man insisted on going out. He could stand his imprisonment no longer; not for Kit, not for the pearls!

Clo was not on sentinel duty when the explosion came. The hole in the wall was open (she stuffed it up only when someone knocked, lest the pair should take alarm at the clearness of sounds), but it was late in the afternoon of a blazing hot day, and the girl lay on her narrow bed, disgusted with life. She had now paid for a second week in advance. There wasn't money to go on with for long, at the present rate, and she knew not how to get more, but it was too hot to trouble about the future. The quarrel next door was so sordid that Clo had ceased to listen, when suddenly the names "Olga and Stephen," spoken loudly by Kit, waked her from a half doze. With the light swiftness of a cat she sprang off the bed, and went to her post.

# XXXII

## "STEPHEN'S DEAD!"

"I thought you'd sure know the whole story," Kit was saying.

"I on'y knowed about Stephen. That I had to know," said Churn.

"But you knew why Pete came to New York, instead of going West, when he got out of stir in Chicago?"

"I know he come to kill Heron——"

"Hully gee! Not so loud!"

"Well, I know 'oo he came for den, if you like dat better."

"But that wasn't the whole reason."

"I knowed he was goin' to get hold o' some papers for Chuff; papers dat was mixed all up mit our business."

"H'm! That's what Chuff wanted us to think—that they concerned us. But if you know about those papers, you must know the rest, about Olga."

"I know vat Olga and Stephen vas to each other, if dat's vat you mean."

"And who Olga is?"

"Olga Beverley."

"Greenhorn! You never got further than that?"

"No. Vat for I get furder? I never see 'er. She's a name to me, dat's all. Nevaire vould I heard even dat name if I didn't take care o' Stephen, when Jake vas off on a bust or doin' a job for Chuff."

"Funny we never got on to this line o' talk before," mused Kit.

"I don't see vy 'funny.' You and me always haf something better to talk about, Katchen. And till dese nine days in dis hole, we never 'ad too much time

together."

"If Pete had been found dead and I hadn't done it, I'd say it was 'Olga!' She was the woman who had to give up the papers to him. He told me he was waitin' for the papers to come. He said he wasn't sure whether she'd bring 'em herself, or this girl you've seen about in the newspapers; the one who called on him Sunday afternoon. I've told you about the women's voices in the hall, and someone sittin' plump on the trunk when I was inside. Well, if I could o' peeped, I bet I'd seen Olga. She was one of the women dressed for the automobile they're tryin' to trace an' can't."

"Would you knowed Olga if you 'ad seen her?"

"Would I? Say, did you never hear of Roger Sands?"

"He was de guy who worked for Heron las' year, and got de gang goin' after him."

"Well, it was Olga he married, but not with her own name. She'd took another so as to get away with the papers. She's had the papers from then till now. The thing that interests me, and maybe will you, is something else. It popped into my nut to-day that the pearls are hers! I bet something went wrong with the papers, and she gave Pete the pearls instead. I bet he was studyin' how to double-cross Chuff, and square himself when—when my act comes on."

"What 'old would Chuff 'ave on a woman married mit a big fellah like Sands?" Churn wanted to know. "Vy she let herself be skinned like dat, for Stephen's dead an' stiff dese tree weeks or more?"

"Yes," Kit repeated. "Stephen's been dead 'most a month. That's one reason they couldn't let things slide, so the minute Pete was free they put him on the job. He was keen, because of Heron. And John Heron blew into New York just the right time, for the plan. Pete was to get the papers first, and then—you know what."

"Yes, I know dat. But Stephen—Stephen gone, what 'old 'ad Chuff on Olga?"

"Booby, dear, Olga doesn't know Stephen's dead."

Clo's blood rushed to her brain. She felt faint. Had she been on her feet she would have fallen. This was the one thing of all for Beverley. Clo felt that she hated this cruel Cheffinsky with an almost murderous hatred. How could she let Beverley know, and make her understand that "Stephen" was dead. Ought she to

go back with her news to Park Avenue, and abandon the pearls? The police could never be asked to take a hand in this business, and before she could even ask help from O'Reilly and Denham, Churn might have disappeared. With herself as sentinel off duty, nothing was sure, for a dangerous restlessness possessed the pair. Still, Beverley would sacrifice the pearls for the knowledge that her enemies had no longer any hold upon her.

"If I dared telegraph!" the girl thought. For she wanted Beverley to have both the knowledge and the pearls.

About this hour Violet was in the habit of toiling up with beer for Kit and Churn, and water or lemonade for their neighbour. The woman was due in a few minutes and Clo spent the interval in concocting a message for Léontine Rossignol.

"Tell your mistress I've had news since I last saw her that Stephen is dead," were the words she decided on, before Violet's arrival was advertised by a tinkle of ice.

The telegram was delivered that night at the flat in Park Avenue, but Mr. and Mrs. Sands and their household had left for Newport. Only a parlour maid remained. She detested Léontine, being Bohemian by birth, while Léontine was French. Anna Schultz decided to forget indefinitely the telegram for Léontine Rossignol.

When she had sent the message, Clo's thoughts went back to the pearls. She would be driven to leave the house soon for lack of money. If she had to go without the pearls, she would feel herself a failure. The net was proving tough for the tiny teeth of a mouse! But the mouse was ready to do anything rather than give up.

That evening Churn again announced his intention to go out at any cost. Whither he was bound, Clo did not know, for she had missed scraps of talk in the next room. Kit cried, and in the midst of hysterical sobs, the door slammed. Churn had gone! Kit continued to sob.

Clo's blood took fire. She flamed with courage. Having fixed upon her plan of action she darted into the passage and knocked on Kit's door.

"Who's that?" came the sharp answer.

"It's only me. The little girl from the next room," Clo explained in a small voice

like a child's. Her hair hung over her shoulders, and she wore a cheap blue muslin dressing gown chosen by Violet.

Kit threw open the door so suddenly, and stared so keenly through the dusk that Clo shrank back a little. "What do you want?" snapped Kit.

"Oh, maybe I oughtn't to have come!" Clo apologized. "I heard you crying. And I'm so homesick and miserable myself! Don't be angry."

Kit opened the door wide. Her bleached yellow hair bristled round her face.

"I didn't know I was howling so loud. Say, can you hear us talkin', me and my husband? I hope we don't keep you awake nights."

"You haven't kept me awake once," Clo assured her with truth. "Crying's easier to hear than talking. You see, I'm in trouble and I'm awfully lonely."

"*I* haven't got any real trouble," said Kit. "Me and my husband sometimes have a spat, like all married folks, and I'm fool enough to bawl. He's out now. Would you like me to come in and visit with you a while?"

"I'd love it!" gasped Clo. She would have preferred an invitation to her neighbour's room, but she hoped for that later. Kit locked her door carefully and slipped the key down the neck of her dress. She accepted Clo's suggestion to sit on the bed, which was more comfortable than the one broken-backed chair. Question after question she put, which cost her hostess tiresome flights of imagination to answer. Clo was far from regretting her move, however. If Churn were absent long, or if he went out again, Kit said that she would return as an escape from boredom.

It was eleven o'clock when once more Clo heard the two voices, and from their conversation Clo gathered that they did not expect Chuff back till the day after to-morrow.

"Day after to-morrow!" echoed Kit. "Then we *must* get Isaacs here to-morrow."

"I t'ought of dat," said Churn. "I went up dere after I see Jake. Isaacs 'as started for Chicago on business, and won't be back till the same day as Chuff, day after to-morrah."

Clo drank in each word, and focussed her mind on its meaning. To-morrow, or the day after, her hour would come; then, or never.

# XXXIII

## THE PATCH ON THE PILLOW

Churn's excursion had justified itself, and the morning after his first absence he went out again. Toward noon Kit, in a "ready-to-wear" looking costume, knocked at Clo's door. "Thought you might want some candy," she said. "Shall I come in?"

Clo was cordial, and tried to be entertaining. "If I can make her like me, perhaps she'll go down to a meal with Churn, and leave me on guard," she reflected. Kit feared to stop long with her new friend lest Churn should arrive while she was "gadding." She dodged back and forth from room to room, and was at home to receive her husband in the afternoon.

Next morning early Clo heard Churn announce that he would meet Isaacs' train at the Grand Central; the "old lady" had told him the time. Kit objected. "You might miss him. Best wait at his place," she advised. But Churn would not be persuaded. He had seen Jake again, who prophesied that Chuff would not arrive before the afternoon. They had the whole morning to see Isaacs and bargain with him, but it would be a waste of time to hang about at "Isaacs' place." Churn would catch Isaacs at the train, and bring him round to Kit. She must clear up the room, and have everything ship-shape in an hour. But Kit's anger grew as Churn insisted. "I know why you're mad to get to the Grand Central," she flung at him. "Didn't you s'pose I noticed the name on the candy box. Bah! I ain't a fool. You said you was sick of bein' boxed up with me. That put me wise."

Churn protested innocence, and went off jauntily, but Clo looked for developments. "Kit's mum, to put Churn off the track," she thought. "But she means to follow him. She's bought no handbag. She can't very well take the pearls."

Clo had read a paragraph concerning Mr. and Mrs. Roger Sands. It referred to the "house-warming party" they were giving at their "lately acquired cottage in Newport." Apparently the affair had been mentioned before in the column devoted to "Society" news, but Clo had missed it. The allusion to the "house-warming," and dinner dance set Clo's brain whirling. Angel would be expected

by her husband to wear the queen's pearls. If he already guessed the secret, this might be a plan to force his wife's hand. Beverley feared him. Clo had seen that. Angel must have the pearls for to-morrow night. And they must be strung, ready to wear, or they would be useless to her, arriving at the last moment. The girl would have been at her wits' end, but for that quarrel next door. If Kit did go spying on Churn...!

The door slammed after Churn. A second later Kit was knocking, calling her new friend by her new nickname: "Kid-Kid! Let me in, quick!"

Clo let her in. Kit was pinning on a wide-brimmed hat, and had her hands full with a veil, gloves, and parasol. "Tie this veil for me, there's a good kid!" she panted. "I'm mad at my husband. He's off to flirt with a beast of a girl in a candy store. They had a mash before we married. You're goin' to be in all mornin', ain't you?"

"I thought of running out to 'phone a friend of mine," said Clo, cleverly.

"Don't! There's a 'phone in the house, the room under mine—room of a pal away till this afternoon. He left his key with Mrs. Mac, and she lent it to my husband last night so he could borrow some novels for me; our pal has lots. We've not given the key back, so when I come home I'll take you down. I want you to stay in while I'm gone. All you need do is to sit with your door open, and see if any one knocks at mine. And I've got the key. But it's the same as every old key; 'tain't a special one like Ch——like our pal's. If a stranger calls look close, so you can describe the person."

"I undertake watchdogging in all its branches," said Clo. "Ta, ta!"

"I count on you!" were Kit's last words at the top of the steps.

"Bet your life you can!" the "kid" called after her. But as Kit ran downstairs, without stopping to look round, Clo dashed to her own open window. In a moment Kit's parasol went bobbing along the street. The coast was clear. Kit's manner made it certain that she had left the pearls behind.

Violet would not come up for the two breakfast trays for a long time yet. Kit's opinion of the key was the same as that already formed by Clo, and the girl was wild to test it. She snatched her own key from its lock, to try it in Kit's door. It went in, but stopped at the critical turn. There were two more rooms on this floor; a small one opposite Clo's, tenanted by a young man who went to work at

seven o'clock; and another still smaller, used as a storeroom—a refuge for trunks, dust-pans, and brooms. The early bird never locked his door, but his key fell short of success.

The storeroom key remained. It did not fail. It turned all the way round in the lock, and Kit's door opened.

Clo's was shut and locked, in case Violet should break her rule and come too soon.

Not only did the girl expect to find the pearls, but Chuff's key, and she hoped to telephone if necessary, before making her "bolt." Wonderful that both these chances should fall together!

Clo knew that the pearls were kept in a drawer; but Kit would not go out and leave them in so obvious a place. Nevertheless, Clo began by looking through the drawers, of which there were six.

Churn's evening clothes hung from a hook on the wall; there was nothing in the pockets; nothing in the shoes which stood underneath except a pair of socks. Other hiding-place there was none, save the bed; and it was there that Clo expected to find the pearls.

Kit had made the bed, and neatly patted the two ill-matched pillows into shape. Clo stripped off the unbleached covers of these pillows and looked for some sign that the ticking had been ripped open. There was a patch on the larger pillow. One end of this patch was unsewn and held in place with a pin. Underneath it something hard could be felt with the hand. Clo undid the pin, and thrusting in her hand pulled out a packet made of a red silk handkerchief tied round with gold string from a confectioner's. Clo squeezed the tight folds of silk. They held the pearls.

It seemed a waste of time to open the handkerchief. She longed to run out of the house with her treasure, without a second's delay. Why search for Chuff's key? As she had found the pearls she did not need to 'phone. The girl was at the door, with her hand on the key, before she realized how mad it would be not to make certain of her find.

Yes, the pearls were really there, the darlings! She re-wrapped the parcel, and again was at the door when another thought struck her. Better make the bed look as it had looked before. She returned, put the pillows back into their covers,

stood them up in place, and during the process decided that she would spare a moment to search for Chuff's key. It might come in handy. Kit had let drop that the key was a special key. Clo guessed that at times there were things to hide, and then Chuff would forget to leave that key for his friends! "It might be useful to Mr. O'Reilly's Denham," she thought. "If I can find it quick——"

And flitting about the room she pounced upon a key which answered Kit's description. It was on the mantelpiece—a small, flat key, of a "special" kind, because it was made for a Yale lock.

She shut the door softly behind her, and locked it as she went out. The borrowed key she replaced in the storeroom. Then she unlocked her own door, and tearing off the blue wrapper, put on the tan-coloured linen suit Violet had bought in a sale, for five dollars. There was a tan straw hat, too (Clo dared not appear in the brown toque and coat described by the newspapers), and a cheap handbag purchased for the pearls in case she should get them. It was a tight fit for the red silk bundle, but she squeezed it in, and added the big pearl found in Peterson's room. She would also have tucked in the Yale key, but the bag refused to shut, and she kept the key in her hand. What money she had left, she slipped inside her blouse; everything else she abandoned. Kit would rage in vain when she looked for the red handkerchief parcel.

"I can't have been half an hour," she thought, as she tripped past the breakfast trays and started downstairs. "Kit and Churn may be out a long while yet. I'd hate to come face to face with 'em in the street!"

Less than half way down, she heard Violet's voice, and her nerves jumped. "On my way up for them trays o'yourn," the woman said.

To whom was she speaking? Kit back already? Yes, Kit was answering her: "I'll run up ahead. I'm in a hurry."

The voices sounded near. Clo felt that her blood was turning to water. Should she fly back and lock herself into her room? No, for Kit would discover her loss, and would guess what had happened. A fight for the pearls would be too uncertain, and Kit would call Mrs. Mac and Vi to the rescue, or Churn might come——But could she hope to pass safely if she went on? No, she had promised to guard the door. Kit would accuse and stop her if they met.

In her anguish Clo's fingers closed upon Chuff's key. If only she could hide in Chuff's room before Kit reached his floor! She stumbled down the last few steps,

and paused at the room under Kit's. Would the key fit? It went deep into the small keyhole, and turned. Kit must be close to the top of the stairs now.

# XXXIV

## TRAPPED

Trembling the girl locked herself into Chuff's room and went straight to the telephone. If O'Reilly were at home he would make a dash to the rescue. Her hand was on the receiver when she remembered that she was marooned. She was ignorant of the 'phone number and had never dared inquire the number of the house or street. Now, when it was too late, she wished with all her heart that she had slipped out late at night, while Kit and Churn slept, and thus found her bearings. She had not gone, because the pair always talked till after midnight, and the later the hour the more important their confidences. But surely she could not fall over this small stumbling block! The girl ran to a writing table and opened the blotting-book. It was old, thickly patterned with stains, but it contained not a single sheet of paper. She pulled out a drawer. There was writing paper in it, but unstamped. While she fumbled, hoping for an old envelope addressed to Chuff, the girl could hear the patter of feet overhead. Kit was in her own room walking about. Suddenly the boards ceased to creak. Kit had stopped. Was it at the bedside? Was she pulling the cover off the patched pillow?

Clo had turned to a shelf crowded with books and magazines when a new idea came to her. She snatched up the blotter and held it open, in front of a mirror, over the mantelpiece. "Dear Peterson," she read, "Churn will take you this, and ____"

The line beneath mingled with others, and could not be disentangled, but the address of the house had been written above, and could be clearly read.

With a sigh of thanksgiving Clo ran to the telephone, called up Central, and asked for the Dietz Hotel. Her voice could no doubt be heard in the hall outside, and might even reach Kit's ears upstairs. But the door must be broken before she could be torn from the 'phone, and at this hour, when all the men boarders were out there was no strong arm for such work. Meantime, O'Reilly might come. The girl longed for him with a new and desperate longing.

The Dietz answered quickly. Mr. Justin O'Reilly was still staying in the hotel, but he had gone out. Tears started to Clo's eyes. She was trapped now, and must

summon Beverley to get the pearls. She had not the Sands' 'phone number, and must ask Central to call the Park Avenue apartment. When she had done this, silence fell. But it was only for a moment. Clo stood, with her ear at the receiver still, when a loud bang on the door made her jump as though she had been shot. The door knob turned.

"You little devil!" shrilled Kit's voice. "You—thief! I know you're there. Wait till I catch you!"

"Hello!" spoke a foreign-sounding voice through the 'phone—the voice of a woman. "Hello! Yes, this is Mrs. Sands' flat. Mr. and Mrs. Sands are not at home."

"When will they be back?" asked Clo.

"I don't know that," answered the cold voice of Anna Schultz. "It may be a long time."

The girl had an instant of despair, but she was not yet beaten. As Kit pounded furiously on the door, Clo called up the jeweller where Ellen Blackburne was employed. Ellen had been in but gone out again; but, oh, she had just returned. She would step to the 'phone.

A moment later Ellen's calm "Hello" seemed to travel to her from a far-distant, peaceful world.

"This is Clo," replied the girl, conscious that voices outside the door ceased their clamour in order that ears might hear her message. "Yes, I said Clo! For God's sake get into a taxi and rush to the number and street I'm going to give you. Listen! Don't stop to ask questions. When you get here, you don't need to come in. I'll drop something out of the window. You can guess what. I'll expect you quick. Good-bye!"

"I heard you!" shrieked Kit. "*I* can guess, too! You've stolen my pearls, and you think you'll pass 'em on to some other thief. But you won't, you devil! We'll have this door down in five minutes."

Clo went to the window, rolled up the blind, and raised the sash.

"Why won't you let me call the police?" she heard Mrs. Mac asking. "I tell you it's the only thing. I——"

"She won't let you do it because she stole the pearls herself," cried Clo, darting across the room to put her lips to the keyhole. "And that's not all she's afraid of."

"I'll kill you when I get my hands round your throat," Kit screamed her down.

"I won't be the first you've killed. Take care!" Clo retorted, and was then stung with regret for her boldness. There would be no mercy for her now from Kit or Churn when the door gave way. They would know that she'd been the woman at the telephone masquerading as Kit.

But, if only Miss Blackburne came first, before they broke in, she didn't much care. With the pearls safe, she could fight for herself.

"Hurrah, by all that's good, here's my Boy!" crowed Kit outside the door. "Churn! you've come! Mr. Isaacs, too! I was never so glad in my life to see any one as you both! There's a thief in Mr. Cheffinsky's room—the girl that's been living next door to us. She's stole my poor little string o' beads."

Men's voices spoke. Churn and Isaacs were indeed there! The girl put her ear to the keyhole once more, and listened.

"What did I tell you about dat key?" Churn caught her up. "You're ten kinds of a fool, girl. But de tief's dere all right, you say?"

"Yes, she's there all right. She must have took Chuff's key off our mantelpiece. You left it there! The little brute's been 'phonin' some pal to come in a taxi so she can drop my pearls out the window."

"Let me go down and talk things over with the pal when he comes," said another voice that was very smooth, and had a lisp. Clo deduced that it was the voice of Isaacs.

"Yes, do go down!" The girl jeered him through the keyhole. "I'll call from the window what you are, a fence; that's your nickname. You're a receiver of stolen goods."

For a few breathless moments there was no sound. Clo wondered if Ellen had started, and how soon the taxi might arrive. She went again to the window and looked out. There was no taxi in sight, no vehicle of any sort, but children playing, women chatting together. Clo wished that she might shriek at the top of her voice "Help!" "Thieves!" "Murder!" A policeman would surely come, and she and the pearls would be saved. But Beverley would be lost. The story of the

pearls would come out somehow. As she gazed like Sister Anne from the tower, two things happened. In the house, a blow from a hammer made the door quiver; in the street a taxi came swinging into sight.

"They'll have the door down!" Clo gasped. "But if only that's Ellen she'll be just in time."

The bag containing the pearls in their red wrapping was in the girl's hand. She stood, prepared to throw it if Ellen appeared. The taxi was slowing down. Yes, it was stopping in front of the house. It must be Ellen—but no! A man stepped out, and glanced quickly in all directions. He did not look up at the window, where Clo had shrunk back as far as she could, not to lose sight of what went on below. He was furtively intent upon a gray limousine car, with several men in it, which had followed the taxi along the street. The motor passed on, however, and its occupants (there were four or five, Clo fancied) were busily talking. They did not look out, or interest themselves in the stopping of the taxi. The man who had come in the latter had the air of hiding behind it, as he paid the chauffeur and carefully counted his change; but the instant the limousine had slid ahead, regardless of him, he ran up the steps. Clo, at the window, could see him no more.

"What if it's Chuff?" she thought, "and he finds them breaking down his door?"

Somehow she had the impression that Cheffinsky was even more wicked than Churn, a man without scruples, a man who would stop at nothing for his own advantage.

"Crack!" went one of the panels, and Clo, flying to the door, snatched the key from the keyhole. She knew the panel could not last many minutes, and a picture rose before her mind of a hand pushing through a hole, to turn the key in the lock. Anyhow, that should not happen!

Back she fled to the window again, and stared anxiously out.

Another taxi appeared. The gray limousine had turned, and was coming back, also. But Clo cared only for the taxi. It was slowing down. A woman thrust her head out and looked up—a neat little head in a black toque. "Miss Blackburne!" The girl cried shrilly. The taxi stopped. But the door stuck. Oh, why didn't the silly chauffeur jump off his seat and help?

Crash! The panel broke with a loud shriek of rending wood. The hammer came

through, and was jerked quickly out again. A man's hand seized a jagged piece of the panel and tore it away. An eye peered through the aperture, but Clo was at the window.

"Quick—quick!" she implored, and brandished the bag far over the sill.

The eye disappeared from the panel, and the muzzle of a revolver took its place.

Miss Blackburne had jumped down on to the pavement.

"If you throw out that bag, I fire," a voice warned Clo—a new voice, not Churn's.

The girl glanced round involuntarily, and saw the small black object imbedded in the smashed door panel. Her nerves jerked, but she turned back to the window, with a sensation of ice in her spine.

"String these and get them to *her*, if you have to take them to Newport!" she cried.

There was a queer muffled explosion, not unlike the breaking of wood, yet somehow different. Clo felt a blow on the shoulder, and then a strange, heart-rending pain. She staggered, fell forward on to her knees, hanging over the window sill. But she threw the bag. A red light flamed in her eyes, not like the light of the summer day. Through the redness she thought she saw a little woman in black catch the bag and stand still, looking up. Clo tried to wave her hand, motioning "Go on—hurry!" and her lips formed the words. She was not sure whether the woman went, or whether she had been stopped at the taxi door by some men getting out of that gray limousine; the cloud of red had grown so thick. But there were noises behind her. The men in the hall had burst the door open. She could not look round again. Her head rested upon her arm, lying on the window sill. Then someone was dragging her away. It was all over for her in this world! But Beverley's pearls were saved.

# XXXV

## THE TIME LIMIT OF HOPE

A big, blond man had hustled Mrs. Mac and Violet downstairs before the shot was fired. It was bewildering to them that Mr. Cheffinsky should come home after his strange absence with his beautiful golden beard and moustache shaved off.

Cheffinsky was like an officer directing a defence. He took command instantly he entered the house, seeming to understand the situation without a question. "If any one rings, let Violet be a long time opening the door," he said. "But it must be opened. Don't act as if there was something to hide. Keep 'em talking, no matter who, or about what as long as you can. There's been a theft from a lady boarder, and a little excitement; you've only to tell the truth—see?"

All this in a second; but it got the two women out of the way. The spy must be muzzled at any cost, for Cheffinsky guessed at a word from Kit that this was the mysterious girl of the telephone.

"Pick her up," he said to Kit, when they had got the locked door open. "If any eyes are on that window, it won't look too queer for one girl to pull another back into the room."

As the other two women had done, Kit obeyed. She was used to obeying Chuff in the past. She dragged Clo to the back of the room, out of sight from the window, and awaited further commands.

"Now," Chuff said, "if we're spotted, this is a suicide—see? She stole your pearls, and when she was caught she killed herself."

"But the shot's in her shoulder—and she ain't dead. She's opening her eyes," Kit objected.

"She's got to be dead," Chuff decreed. "I know how to fix the bullet business. It'll have to be done now, because if trouble comes it will come quick. Look here; this is the thing to do, if there's questions to answer. You caught her stealing. She ran down to this room from yours, threw the stuff out of the window to a pal, and

then grabbed my Browning from the mantelpiece. She'd have shot you, but seeing the men, knew the game was up, and did for herself instead. Shut the window, Kit. I'm going to put another ball into her, in the chest, just opposite the spot of blood on her back. Carry her into the closet, to cover the sound. I mustn't touch her myself. There's spots on you already. Account for them by saying you picked her up to see if she was alive."

"But if she's in the closet——"

"She ran there, and shot at you from inside the door, after we'd all broken into the room to get at her. Is that clear to you both? We must stick to the same story. Into the closet with her, Kit."

Clo felt a strange sensation, as if her soul had left the body that hung limp in Kit's strong arms, and was gazing at it with impersonal pity. "The worst will be ended for me in a minute," she thought. Then, suddenly, she remembered Justin O'Reilly. A great desolation of loneliness swept over her. He would be sorry. But he was far away.

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When Clo telephoned, Ellen Blackburne did not even know that the Sands were out of New York. The message, however, instantly awoke her sleeping interest. She guessed that Clo had tracked the thief, and that what she called the "weird address" given was the "lair." Miss Blackburne was no coward, and the astonishing request that came over the telephone wires did not frighten her. She prepared to follow instructions at once, taking only one precaution. Before starting, she left word that if she did not 'phone or return within an hour, inquiries were to be made at the house and in the street whose number she wrote down.

The pearl-stringer did, therefore, precisely what she had been asked to do. She abandoned the work laid out for the morning, and dashed off in a taxi on a moment's notice. Clo's little face at the window of a tenth-rate boarding-house told her nothing new. Clo was always pale. When the girl dropped to her knees it looked to Ellen as if that attitude were more convenient for throwing down the bag. No sound of a pistol shot reached Ellen's ears over the noises of the street. She heard only the "teuf-teuf" of her own taxi, and the snort of a big gray car which had at that instant come to a stop close by. Miss Blackburne was used to

odd adventures, and prided herself on "keeping cool," but she could not help giving an undignified jump as a man sprang out of the gray limousine and laid a hand on her arm.

"What is in that bag and where are you taking it? I've a right to know," he said sharply. "I'm a friend of Miss Riley."

Ellen grabbed at the door of her taxi. The man was about thirty or thirty-two, she thought, certainly a gentleman and rather handsome. "I'm acting for Miss Riley," she returned as sharply. "My name's Blackburne. Clo's in a hurry for me to do an errand. If you're really her friend, you'd better let me get away while you look after her."

The two eyed each other for an instant. "You are Miss Ellen Blackburne, the pearl-stringer?" the man inquired.

"The same," she answered.

"Then go on her errand!" he exclaimed. And while Ellen stared, he ran up the steps of the house where a companion had already rung the bell. Neither of the men looked again at her. Ellen waited for no more. To save delay and further suspense for Mrs. Sands she drove straight to the Park Avenue house, in order to string the pearls there: for she had hastily collected her materials before starting. It was a blow to hear from the hall porter that the Sands had already left New York; she decided on going up to get further information. She even thought of sending a long-distance message to Beverley from her own flat; but the grim personality of Anna Schultz banished this idea at a glance. Ellen realized that if she asked to enter the apartment she would be regarded as a suspicious character. Important business with Mrs. Sands would take her to Newport immediately, she told Miss Schultz. If there were any letter or parcel to be sent she would carry it.

Anna's reply to this offer was a stiff refusal, but Miss Blackburne had not reached the lift when the woman came after her. "I've just remembered, there's a telegram for Mrs. Sands' French maid, you might give her by hand, if you're going to Newport to-day," she said, with a grudging air. "It will be quicker than posting." Anna Schultz slipped the envelope into Ellen's hand, and turned away without waiting for an answer.

Having telephoned to the jewellers where she was employed, Ellen decided to string the pearls at home. She dared not dash off to Newport without seeing her mother, and arranging with a neighbour to stop in the house while she was gone.

On second thoughts, she told herself that, for Mrs. Sands' own sake, it might be best not to risk a reassuring message of any sort in advance. Someone else might happen to receive it! She determined simply to work as fast as possible, and take the first train she could catch for Newport, with the restrung rope of pearls.

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Beverley dreaded the night of the dance more even than she had dreaded her mission, nearly a year ago, in Albuquerque.

It seemed very long since she had been radiantly happy in the thought of this glorified cottage at Newport—"Gulls' Rest"—Roger's present to her. She hated it now, and everything associated with it; the fuss of settling into the place, in a foolish hurry, though the Newport season had not yet begun: Roger's determination to begin with a house-party and a dance; his civil, quiet coldness to her; the strange look she caught in his eyes at times; the mystery of Clo's silence, which deepened day by day; fear of reprisals for loss of the papers; these things seemed harder to bear in Newport than at home in New York. Often Beverley wondered how long she would be sane.

The Sands had brought with them a couple of friends: two others had joined them the day after, and half a dozen more had come since. Roger had engaged all the rooms in a small but delightful hotel for extra guests who would arrive for the dance and stay the night; and, in advance of the season as the house-warming was, word had gone out that the entertainment would be worth a long journey. The favours for the cotillon were said to have cost ten thousand dollars; and there was to be a "surprise" of some sort. Perhaps this was the reason why Mrs. Heron changed her mind, and John Heron wired to Roger that he and his wife would be pleased to come on from Narragansett, where they were spending a weekend for Heron's health.

The invitation had been sent to the Herons by Roger's firmly expressed wish, but Beverley had not dreamed that it would be accepted. And, after all, they were both coming to the dance! This seemed ominous. It gave her one more fear for the dreaded night.

Through the morning she still wildly hoped for news from Clo. Even as the afternoon wore on she did not utterly despair; but at six o'clock, when Roger advised her and the other women staying in the house to rest till dressing-time,

she definitely gave up. For the first time since that Sunday night which marked the end of happiness, Roger slipped his hand under her arm in a friendly, familiar way.

"Come along," he said. "I'll trot you up to your room and see that you lie down. I want you to look your best to-night; and you know dinner's at eight. You won't have more than an hour's nap. I suppose it'll take you at least an hour to dress?"

"Just about," Beverley answered, dully. She knew that she could not sleep, but she was worn out with the effort of "keeping up" before her guests. She expected Roger to leave her at the door of her room, which he had entered only when the house was being shown to friends; but to her surprise, almost alarm, he followed her in. She said that she would not ring yet for Léontine. She would unfasten her own frock and find her own dressing-gown.

"I'll draw the curtains for you," Roger suggested, in the coolly kind manner to which she had grown accustomed during the black fortnight. "One rests one's brain best in twilight, I think. I'm sure you need rest. I never saw you so pale. I hope you're not worried about to-night?"

"Worried? Why should I be worried?" she echoed. "I'm sure everything will go well, aren't you?"

"I hope so," he said, gravely. "You haven't shown me your new dress. I suppose it's come?"

"Oh, yes," Beverley replied, convinced that it was not about the dress he thought or cared. "It came the day after we arrived."

"Good! Then you'll be able to do full justice to the pearls!"

Beverley had the impulse to throw herself into her husband's arms and upon his mercy; but she would not, or could not—she hardly knew which. It seemed to her that he was being purposely cruel, and was deliberately testing, torturing her, to see how much she could bear and not break. "Let him find out when the time comes," she thought, in sullen despair. Instead of confessing her trouble she asked if he would like to see her new gown.

"No," Roger said. "I'll wait till you're ready and I can see you in your glory—pearls and all."

Beverley merely smiled an answer, and wondered what Roger thought of her

smile. He drew the curtain, and led her to rest, asking at the door that she would promise to call him when she was dressed. "I want to have a good look at you before you go downstairs," he added as he went out.

Adjoining Beverley's bedroom was a small room whose wall appeared to be composed entirely of mirrors. It was a glorified wardrobe with mirror doors, and light and ventilation came from above. Behind the mirror doors were deep closets, some of which were lined with cedar, others with sandalwood; and at the back of one was an ingeniously concealed safe. In this safe Mrs. Roger Sands' jewels had already been placed, and among them was the empty case which had contained the queen's pearls. Beverley slid back the sandalwood panel, and opened the steel door behind it, which was manipulated by a miniature time-lock.

"Suppose I wear diamonds and emeralds," she thought, "and tell Roger they match better with my dress than the pearls—that I'll wear the pearls another time?"

But at the best this would only postpone the evil moment.

She took off her dress of embroidered white organdie, and put on a *robe de chambre*. Then she dropped wearily down on a great, cushiony sofa, not to rest, but because she had nothing else to do.

It was very still in her room, save for a far-off murmur of waves below the rocks. When she had remained thus for about three quarters of an hour she sprang up, her brain throbbing more feverishly, her body quivering more uncontrollably than when she had lain down. It was close upon seven o'clock, and she rang for Léontine. Her hair had to be done, and the whole process of dressing would need quite an hour.

"I daresay Mary Stuart took a lot of pains dressing to have her head cut off," she thought bitterly.

Léontine came, and made ready her mistress's bath. She emptied a bottle of eau de Cologne into the tepid water, but for once the refreshing scent failed to revive Beverley. She was like a creature in a dream as Léontine wound her long hair in bands round her head (a new fashion Roger had fallen in love with a few weeks ago), fastening it here and there with diamond pins. "Madame will be late if we are not careful," the Frenchwoman said. "Everything takes so long to-night." She laid on the floor at Beverley's feet a cloud of silver gauze, supple as chiffon. It

was the new dress and Madame must step into it to avoid ruffling her hair. Beverley obeyed, and when her arms had slid into the odd little jewelled sleeves, she let Léontine draw her gently in front of a mirror.

"Madame is like a marvellous statue of ivory and silver," the maid exclaimed. "But she should have some colour. If Madame—but no, it is too late. There is a knock. It will be Monsieur. Shall I open the door?"

"Yes, open the door," Beverley echoed. Her voice sounded metallic and unnatural in her own ears.

# XXXVI

## "WE DO THINGS QUICKLY OVER HERE"

"Is this heaven?" Clo wondered.

"No, you darling, it's not. It's our same poor old world; but it'll be near heaven if you'll get well and live for me," said Justin O'Reilly. Then it seemed to the girl that she heard a very odd, choking sound, and on to her half-parted lips fell a drop of something hot. She tasted this, and found it salt.

"You—you can't be crying?" she mumbled.

"I am." O'Reilly answered, "crying with joy. I don't remember doing it before—in joy or sorrow. Here goes another tear! Sorry! I couldn't help spilling it on you. Shan't happen again."

O'Reilly's face was close to hers. She smiled up at him. Everything seemed strange except that he should call her darling. That, somehow, was not strange at all. Nor was it strange that his head should be bent over her upturned face. Yet he said it was the same poor old world!

"I thought I was dead," she explained.

"I thought so, too, for a minute, and it was the worst minute and the worst thought I ever had. But you're alive. And you're going to live. I tell you that on the doctor's authority. He and the nurse are having a confab in the next room. In fact, when we saw you coming to all right, after the anæsthetic (a bullet had to come out of your poor little shoulder!) I asked them to leave me alone with you. I wanted to be the first one your eyes saw. You're going to live for me, aren't you? Because I adore you, you know!"

"I know," the girl echoed, floating on a strange, bright wave of joy.

"You know I adore you?"

"Something told me it would come out like that," she said. "In those long days when I had to lie still in my room and listen to Kit and Churn, another voice—so different from theirs!—seemed to say it in my ear. Your message for me in the

newspaper—I was sure it was for me—put it into my head. I couldn't answer. But the message was the greatest comfort! I didn't feel alone after that."

"Precious one! You're a star heroine, and a martyr and a saint, and I don't know what not. But most of all, you are my life—my very life. I've had a big disappointment since I parted from you—lost a thing I'd wanted for years—lost it to Roger Sands. His revenge for—I hardly know what! Yet finding you and holding you like this shows me that nothing else matters. What's a house, anyhow, except this darling house not made with hands—your little body, house of your soul? When you know me better, could you learn to love me, do you think, if I try hard to teach you?"

"Oh, but I do love you already," said Clo, as a matter of course. "Even that first night—there was something about you—I hated to cheat and rob you the way I did. And it was wonderful hearing your voice in the telephone, in Peterson's dreadful room. It wasn't only that I hoped you'd help, it was because it was you—because you were different for me from anybody else, different even from Angel."

"Good Lord, I should hope so!"

"And I've wanted you dreadfully ever since. That's why I thought it must be heaven when I woke up just now and saw you."

"You angel!"

"How funny you should call me that. Oh, I've almost forgotten my poor Angel! I must get to her, somehow." Clo looked around hastily, and realized that she was lying on a bed in a peculiarly unattractive room, and that O'Reilly was kneeling on the floor by the bedside. "How wicked of me to think more about you than her!"

"If you mean Mrs. Sands, you shall go to her when you're able. Mrs. Sands is all right. You sent her something rather important by Miss Blackburne, the pearl-stringer that you told me about that night in the taxi—and in Krantz's Keller. I talked to the woman—and cursed myself afterward for stopping to speak, when I found you and saw how every instant had counted. I oughtn't to have waited even for a second."

"Oh, you couldn't have saved me if you'd come up without speaking to Ellen. The shot was fired before I threw out the bag with the pearls," Clo broke in. "I

remember now. Someone fired through the hole in the door. It was Chuff, I'm sure. It didn't hurt much. It was like a heavy blow, and I couldn't help dropping on my knees at the window. I felt weak and queer, but I called to Ellen. Then somebody picked me up—Kit, I think. I could hear them arguing what to do with me. Funny! I thought of you then—and that's the last I remember till now."

"I must have been in the house by that time," O'Reilly soothed her. "I had come for you! I was sure you'd be where Kit was, because of the pearls. Denham and I had been trying to track Churn and Kit and Chuff—all the lot you told me about—ever since you turned me down, in Krantz's Keller."

"I didn't turn you down!"

"No, I don't mean that! You were a brave little soldier going into battle on your own."

"A soldier? No, I was only a mouse."

"I know. 'The lion's mouse.' And to gnaw the net the lion was caught in, you had to stick your head into another lion's den. But some memoranda you'd picked up and left for us put Denham on the right trail. He doesn't need much of a pointer, that chap! He fairly jumped on to the track of a fellow named Isaacs—at least Isaacs is his 'alias'—a man who's been suspected for a long time as a receiver of stolen goods—a fence. When I got the tip that Kit and Churn were staying in the house where we were to spot Chuff, I was sure I had the clue to you. I wish to God we'd been five minutes earlier; but I thank Him we weren't five minutes too late! If the police eventually bring the crime home to Kit (that's improbable, Denham thinks) there's nothing to link up the story with the name of Mrs. Sands."

"Oh, I'm not sure!" breathed Clo. "Kit knows about her. She told Churn."

"She won't tell any one else, you may depend on that. If she's accused of the murder, she won't confess to stealing somebody's pearls as her motive. She'll say that Peterson insulted her, and she feared him; some sob-sister stuff of that sort."

"She did complain to Churn that Pete was horrible to her, and that if Churn had been there to hear what he said, he'd have killed him quick," Clo remembered.

"You see, she wanted to clear herself in the eyes of her best young man! How much more anxious she'd be to keep on the same line if it came to saving herself from the Chair! You can make your mind easy about your friend Mrs. Sands. I

won't say a word against her. You love her. You may be right, I may be wrong. I'm growing humble. I don't set my judgment against yours, even though I know some things about the lady which it's probable you don't know. But she's been good to you. That makes all the difference to me. She's to be saved from the consequences of things which—you'll never hear from my lips. Saved she shall be if it depends at all on yours ever. But you've done so much that little more remains."

"Then you'll give her the papers?"

"The papers you returned to me that Sunday night?"

"It wasn't I who returned them. I don't know who did send them. It's the greatest mystery! But if you love me, you'll hand them back."

O'Reilly looked grave. "I love you," he said, "more than I ever thought it was in me to love, though I had an idea it might go hard with me when my time came. But I gave the papers to Heron, whose property they were—and are. I was only keeping them for him because he had reason to think they weren't safe in his possession."

"John Heron!" Clo echoed. A thought had suddenly started out from the background of her mind, pushing in front of her fears for Beverley. "Yes, of course, he's a friend of yours! But he's in worse danger than his papers ever were. From things they said, I believe Pete came East on purpose to kill him. Of course, there were the papers to get as well. But he wanted to kill John Heron. It was Chuff who ordered him to get the papers. Pete had some grudge of his own against Mr. Heron, so he made a good catspaw. When Pete was killed, Chuff had to find someone else to do the job. I don't know John Heron, and never saw him in my life, so I——"

"There you're mistaken," O'Reilly broke in. "Did you notice any one coming out of a room next to my suite when you were letting yourself in with my key which you had—er—found?"

"Yes!" cried Clo. "A beautiful woman in a black dress with gorgeous jewellery; and a tall man with reddish hair and beard and—Oh, eyes! Great dark eyes that looked at me in a strange way. I felt them in my spine."

"That was the first time you saw John Heron, the man his enemies still call the Oil Trust King—though thanks to Roger Sands they daren't call him that out

aloud. The second time must have been in Heron's own room. But you shall judge for yourself. He'd been downstairs with his wife. He went up to his rooms again for something, and in the hall outside his own door—which he'd just unlocked—he fell down in a sort of fainting fit. Well, putting two and two together, after you told me your adventure creeping along the ledge from my window to his, it occurred to me that there'd been just cause for the seizure. I didn't think Heron was the man to keel over in a faint, even for a thing like that. All the same, seeing that ghostly vision would account for his attack."

"I understand," said Clo. "I saw he was flabbergasted. But that first time at the door, when he was with his wife, he didn't look at me as if I were a stranger. It was as if he knew me, and almost fell over himself to see me again. That was the feeling I had, but I was—a little excited."

"Most girls would have been corpses!"

"I felt like a live coal. But we mustn't let the gang make a corpse of Mr. Heron, must we? Let's warn him. Where are we, anyhow?"

"Same house you were in. Doctor said it wouldn't be safe to move you. We disinfected the best we could in a hurry, and he extracted the bullet from your poor little shoulder. Thank God, I was in time, or there might have been another bullet or two, that couldn't be extracted! You're all right now, or will be with a little rest, and we'll get you into a nursing home. As for Heron, he and his wife have gone to Narragansett. That's close to Newport, you know, where Mrs. Sands is."

"Angel in Newport already! Then the pearls—but I told Ellen Blackburne to take them there if she had to. Do you think she will?"

"Sure! She'll catch the first train."

"No. She won't do that. She thinks of her mother before everything. But the ball's not till to-morrow. Angel won't need the pearls till then. Oh, if I could be sure she'll get them! I can't rest till I'm sure. I must go to Newport. I must."

"When you're strong enough."

"I'm strong enough now. Is it late?"

"Getting on toward evening. You were a long time coming to yourself. Presently the doctor will say whether you can be moved to-night to that nursing home."

"If I can be moved to a nursing home I can be moved to Newport. Tell the doctor I shall burst if I can't go."

"You may tell him yourself."

"I *must* go. I must know if all goes right with the pearls. I must know if it's better or worse for Angel that Stephen's dead."

"Stephen's dead!"

"Yes. Did you know him?"

"I know of him. He is——"

"Don't tell me. She mightn't want me to hear. I haven't heard anything except that Kit and Churn talked about his having died, and said Angel had been cheated."

"By Jove, I begin to see light."

"Now you see why I must go to her? And you've forgotten maybe what I told you about Mr. Heron. If he's near Newport, I——"

"Look here, darling, if the doctor says you can be taken there to-morrow—oh, in time to arrive before the famous ball—let's say in a comfortable motor car, travelling slowly, banked up on cushions, will you go as my wife?"

Clo stared as if O'Reilly had broken into some strange language which he expected her to understand. "Your wife?"

"Well—don't you expect to marry me? That's what happens when a girl and a man love each other."

"Oh—some day—if you're sure you really want an ignorant little girl like me, brought up in an orphan asylum, who's worked in a shop and hasn't a penny in the world—except a dollar or two left of Mrs. Sands' money. A long time from now, when you've thought about it——"

"I've thought of nothing else since we met and parted, and I realized that you were my life and soul. If you can make up your mind to 'some day,' it might just as well be to-morrow. Don't you want to console me for the loss of the only other thing, besides you, I've ever wanted with all my heart? You do if you love me. The dear old house that was my father's! You know, when you sent up your name at the Dietz as Miss O'Reilly, I believed you were my cranky cousin Theresa,

come to tell me she'd changed her mind about selling the house. Why, you owe it to me, if you care, to make up for that. Your Angel's husband has bribed Theresa to sell to him. The place has passed away from me forever. But if you'll marry me to-night I shan't care. In the joy of being husband—and nurse—to the bravest and dearest mouse in the world I'll forget everything and be the happiest man on God's earth."

"People don't get married at a few hours' notice."

"Don't they? How long have you lived in the United States, my Irish colleen?"

"Months. Over a year. But I never discussed marriage."

"I'm jolly glad you didn't. But you'll hear of nothing else till the knot's tied. We do things quickly over here."

Then the door opened, and the doctor came in.

# XXXVII

## THE TELEGRAM

Roger Sands had hardly known himself for many days. His wife had read him aright. At times he was purposely cruel. At times he did wish to see how much she could bear and not break. Yet if she had broken, he felt that he could not have helped seizing her in his arms and forgiving her.

While he dressed that night he hoped that she would send for him, or come to him, and confess that the pearls were gone, that she had given them to O'Reilly, whom she had once loved, and whom she loved no more.

But she neither sent nor came. She was bluffing it out to the last. He might have known she would do that, although he had taken her to her room to give her one more chance to repent. At half-past seven he was ready, but he waited quietly ten minutes. Then he went to his door, meaning—as he said to himself roughly—to "get the thing over." But he paused with his hand on the knob. He thought that he heard a woman's voice saying: "May I come in?"

His muttered comment upon one of his and Beverley's guests, whom he supposed the intruder to be, was far from flattering. Perhaps, however, it would be well not to find his wife alone. He would give Beverley a few minutes more, to be sure that her dress was on, before he went to interrupt the chorus of mutual admiration; but no woman's presence should prevent him from asking the question he meant to ask—"Where are your pearls?"

At exactly eight minutes to eight Roger ceased his restless tramp up and down the room, and stopped again at the door. Before he could open it, however, there was a light tap—a tap like Beverley's in happier days. "Can she mean, after all, to tell me the truth?" he wondered; and he heard his voice saying mechanically, "Come in."

Beverley came in; Roger's room was full of light, and as his wife entered she faced it. She glittered from head to foot like an ice maiden under a blazing sun. She wore a wreath of diamond roses; round her waist was a girdle of diamonds with long tasselled ends; on her white satin shoes were diamond buckles; and over her bare, white neck, her young gauze-enfolded bosom, hung the rope of

the queen's pearls.

"I thought you were coming in to see me dressed?" she said calmly. "Did you forget?"

For answer Roger stared. He stepped back into the room, and let Beverley shut the door. She stood before him smiling, though, if he had analyzed her smile, he would have said that it was sad. "How do you think I look?" she asked, when he did not speak. "I hope you're not disappointed?"

"You have had those pearls copied!" he flung at her.

Beverley blushed bright crimson. She understood instantly what he meant and thought, but she had not gone through tortures and been relieved at the last moment to be beaten down now.

"What do you mean?" she asked, her eyes steady, her head up.

"You thought I didn't know. But I have known from the first. I found out by accident. I always hoped you'd some day tell me the truth. This is a cowardly thing you've done."

Beverley was again ivory pale. "Are you a judge of pearls, Roger?" she coldly inquired.

"Yes," he said.

She lifted the rope over her head and thrust it, against his will, into his hands. "Make any test you wish, and decide whether these are the pearls you gave me or an imitation."

Hardly knowing what he did, he walked to a table, on which stood a tall lamp that gave a brilliant light. Beverley watched him. There was no emotion whatever on her face. After a moment he spoke: "These are genuine pearls," he admitted, after a heavy silence. "And I have reason to believe from certain marks that they are the pearls I bought for you, the queen's pearls. If you give me your word, that since I put them into your hands you did not part with them to Justin O'Reilly, as I have believed, I will beg your forgiveness on the knees of my soul. I will confess to you—as I once expected you to confess to me."

"Hush! There's someone at the door!" Beverley cut him short.

It was Léontine who knocked, and paused on the threshold. "Will Madame have

the kindness to step into the hall," she asked. As her mistress moved toward her, she retired, and it was not until they both stood at some distance from the door that the Frenchwoman spoke.

"I beg Madame's pardon for disturbing her," she apologized, "but I dare not delay. The lady, Mees Blackburne, if that is her name, was about to start back to town, but remembered a commission she had been given at the apartment; to bring a telegram for me. I opened it, to find that for me there is no sense. I know no Stephen; but——"

"Stephen!" Beverley gasped the name, and snatched from the woman's hand an open telegram she held. She read it, and then without a word or cry, collapsed in a dead faint. With a shriek of fear Léontine tried to catch the swaying figure; but the best she could do was to break the fall. When Roger reached the door it was to find Beverley in a white heap on the floor with the Frenchwoman kneeling by her side. He caught his wife up, and, carrying her back into his room, laid her on the bed.

"Let everybody be told that dinner will be delayed half an hour," he said, and shut the door in Léontine's face. She snatched the dropped telegram and whisked off to obey the master's command.

# XXXVIII

## WHO IS STEPHEN?

As Roger stood looking down at Beverley she opened her eyes.

"Stephen is dead!" she muttered. "Stephen—is dead."

"Who is Stephen?" Roger asked shortly.

"Oh, Roger!" she appealed to him, breaking into sobs. "My poor Stephen! I shall never see him again. All my sacrifices—in vain!"

"Who is Stephen?" Roger repeated.

She held up her arms, without answering his questions. "Roger—comfort me!" she wept.

And for all his life, no matter how many years he may live, Roger Sands will be glad that he did not hold back from Beverley then. Without another word he clasped her tightly, while she cried against his cheek. Both had forgotten that there were guests, that this was the "big night" which all the newspapers were talking about; that already dinner was late, and people wondering; that the "ball" was to begin at ten-thirty, and that the Russian dancers who were to open it, as the great "surprise," would soon be in the house.

When Beverley had sobbed until exhaustion came, she spoke, in a tiny voice, like that of a tired little girl: "Because Stephen is—safe, I can tell you everything now. Will you listen, Roger, until the end, whether you can forgive me or no?"

"Yes," Roger answered. "But just this before you begin! I love you so much, Beverley, that if there's something to forgive it's forgiven already."

"Stephen was my brother," she said, "the one person who belonged to me after father died. Mother I don't remember. She came of a high Russian family who were sent to Siberia as political prisoners. She was only sixteen, and father saved her by making her his wife. I was named 'Olga' after her. But for that dreadful journey from Albuquerque I had to have some name that wouldn't give me away when my ticket was bought. Stephen and I were called Bevan, because father

used that name for his business in Russia, but his own name was Beverley. For travelling that day I was 'Miss B. White.' Once I'd told you I was Beverley, I had always to be Beverley for you.

"Stephen—or Stephan, his Russian name—and I, were born in Russia, where father superintended an immense tract of oil wells for Mr. Heron. When my father was killed in an explosion (I was fourteen and Stephen twelve) Mr. Heron felt it his duty to look after our future. He had just married at that time. You must know Mrs. Heron well enough to understand that she wouldn't like to have two half-grown-up children thrust upon her. Why, she used to be jealous even of her husband's first wife, an Irish girl, who died years and years ago, in Ireland! It seems Mr. Heron hadn't told her about his old love story. She came across a picture of him taken with the girl, and some letters from people Mr. Heron had employed to search for his wife, whom he had quarrelled with and left. I was staying at their house when Dolores discovered the photograph and letters. She rushed into the room where I was with Mr. Heron. He had to seize her hands to keep her from tearing the picture in pieces; and he held them while he told her his sad story. He'd been visiting Ireland, it seemed, years before, and met a girl, very poor but very lovely, and married her when they'd known each other a few weeks. It seemed the girl had been engaged to someone else; and that someone took a cruel revenge on Heron. By a plot which he confessed afterward when it was too late, he made it appear that the girl had been his mistress. The evidence was so strong Heron could hardly help believing, so he came back to America and tried to forget. Years after the other man, dying of typhoid, confessed to a priest that he had lied, and forged letters. The priest wrote to Heron. But the poor, deserted girl was dead, and all that Heron could learn when he dashed back to Ireland to find her was that a baby girl had been born a few months after he left his wife. He tried for years to trace the child, but could not. And it was only after he'd given up all hope that he married Dolores Moreno. I think Mr. Heron felt tender over us children because of his lost little one. After leaving us in Russia at school for a while, and a year in England, to learn the language better than we knew it, another year in France and another in Italy (in families whom he paid to educate and take care of us) he must have had a longing to see what we were like. He and Dolores, his wife, came abroad, and brought us back to America with them, much against Dolores' will, I know. I was nearly eighteen, and I realized the first minute we met that Dolores was going to hate me. We went straight to a house near Albuquerque, which belongs to Mrs. Heron. Her brother Louis always lived there. He was an invalid, you know; about a year younger than Dolores; something wrong with his heart, and almost a hunchback

—but oh, what a handsome face! When he took a violent fancy to me her one thought was to get me out of his way. Louis had money of his own. He was rich, and I suppose Dolores was afraid I might try to marry him, as I hadn't a penny. It was bad enough for her that Mr. Heron should have a tenderness for me, because of his lost child; but that Louis should love me was more than she could stand. I was sent to a boarding-school, and when I was twenty I began to teach. Dolores didn't like Stephen, either. She grudged every penny her husband spent for us.

"Mr. Heron used his influence, and got Stephen work in Los Angeles as a reporter on a newspaper, when he was only eighteen. He was tall and handsome, and could pass for two years older at least. I was very unhappy at this time, for I'd begun to worry about Stephen. I was sure he was keeping some secret from me. But I found out nothing till the crash came. Oh, Roger, it was horrible. He'd fallen under the influence of those anarchists—those dynamiters, who had been terrorizing all America for years. They'd persuaded him that they were noble reformers. Poor Stephen was a useful tool. He never did any of the dynamiting with his own hands, but he used to make bombs, and carry them from place to place, and take letters it wasn't thought safe to send through the post. It was the blowing-up of the *Times* buildings in Los Angeles and all those innocent men being killed that sickened him, he confessed afterward, when at last he opened his heart to me. But he was too deep in to free himself. It's now two years ago that the break happened, and all our life collapsed—Stephen's and mine.

"Some of the old lot he'd worked with were left—men who had managed to keep clear and never be suspected when William Burns, the detective, was fighting the Macnamaras and their gang. Only one or two who'd been under suspicion wriggled out from Burns' clutches. A man named Carl Schmelzer was the cleverest. He went abroad, and was supposed to die in Germany. But he didn't die. By that time they were engaged in new enterprises, as the old ones were too risky; but they always pretended to be working for Labour against Capital. John Heron was their target two years ago. The war cry was that he was the master, a tyrant, a plutocrat, ruthlessly crushing the weak. The Comrades knew our history —Stephen's and mine—and they tried to inflame Stephen against Mr. Heron because he'd failed to do for us what our father's services and death merited. But they made a big mistake when they ordered my brother to dynamite a railway bridge, just as a train with Heron's private car was due to pass over it. He refused, and threatened to warn Heron unless they abandoned all their schemes against him. That gave the gang a fearful fright. They thought their one chance of safety was to suppress Stephen. A friend of his who lived at Home Colony

warned him that there was a plot to kill him. He came straight to me and told me the whole story. Neither of us had much hope. We thought the Comrades were sure to get him in the end. Then a wonderful thing happened. The train Stephen took, after his visit to me, was wrecked. Everybody in the car with Stephen was killed except himself. An idea came to Stephen. He put a silver cigarette-case with his name on it into the pocket of a man burnt past recognition—a man of about his own size. Then he crept away and hid for many days. When he hoped it might be fairly safe, he wrote to me, knowing I mourned for him as dead. He asked if I'd risk going with him to Russia to begin a new life there under another name. Of course I said 'Yes.'

"I left the school, and some jewellery I had kept us going for a while till there was a ship we could take for Japan, and so get back to Russia. We'd have to sail from San Francisco, so presently we went to Oakland, travelling at night by local trains. We hoped in that way we should not be seen by any one we knew.

"Whether someone did see us or not, I can't tell. Anyhow, from the day Stephen left me to buy our cabins on the ship I've never seen him again. He was kidnapped by the gang; and then began my martyrdom. They gave me a week of suspense. Then I got a letter. It told me that Stephen had been caught and would be punished by death for his treachery unless I'd agree to buy his life. I was warned that if I went to the police, it would be known to them, and Stephen instantly killed. If I consented to bargain I must put a 'personal' in a San Francisco paper, saying 'Steve's sister says yes'; in that case an appointment would be made with a man who would tell me what to do to save Stephen.

"Of course, I obeyed. Next day the same paper told 'Steve's Sister' where to go for instructions, and at what time. I think the man who met me must have been Schmelzer himself, just back from Europe. He had the authoritative manner Stephen had spoken of, and a great deal of gesture. He didn't give himself any name then, but afterward I knew him as Cheffinsky. To save my brother I had only to get a bundle of papers which were in the possession of John Heron. They were at Albuquerque in Mrs. Heron's house. Heron kept them there because he believed no one would suspect; but a spy the 'Comrades' had hired to act as a gardener there overheard a conversation, and knew the hiding-place. Unfortunately he couldn't put his hand on the papers without killing a man to get at them. For me, it would be simple, because Louis Moreno was in love with me. Louis had charge of the papers, and would let me see them if I treated him the right way. How Cheffinsky found out about Louis and me I never heard; perhaps from Stephen. I was given a day to think the matter over. Then there was to be

another meeting in the same place. When I went to the rendezvous for the second time—it was in a park—I hadn't made up my mind. But, oh, Roger, the wretch showed me a snapshot of Stephen in a room, with a rope round his neck, standing on tiptoe. The rope was fastened to a ring in the ceiling, where a chandelier had been. If Stephen had dropped from fatigue he would have choked to death. 'Six hours a day of this medicine,' Cheffinsky said, 'till you've handed us the papers we want.'

"I promised to go to Albuquerque and get them. What the papers were I wasn't told. Afterward I heard more about them—from Louis himself. The day of the second meeting in the park I was given directions what to do, but they were changed in a hurry. The Comrades got warning to 'clear out' and go East as quick as they could. A telegram reached me only a few hours before I was to start for Albuquerque. It said, 'Delay journey. Writing,' and a letter came the same night to the quiet little boarding-house where I stayed. My brother had been taken East, where I should meet him when I handed over the papers. I was told what train to take to Albuquerque, and what train to leave in: the Santa Fé Limited. I was to find reservations on board for 'Miss B. White.' At Chicago I was to get out of the train and find a man waiting for me. You know all about that, and what happened. There was money in the letter of instructions, enough to see me through to Chicago, otherwise I couldn't have started. What I had was almost all gone. Oh, I can hardly bear to think of that day, and what I went through—before I met *you*."

"Don't think of it—don't go on if you'd rather not," Roger begged.

But Beverley wished to go on.

"There was one thing the Comrades hadn't calculated upon," she said, "and that was that the Herons would be at Albuquerque. When the plan was made the Herons were at Los Angeles, and expecting to stay there. You must have been with them—just after the great case was decided in John Heron's favour—thanks to you! But Louis had been seized with one of his heart attacks—he had angina pectoris—and had wired for his sister. Dolores didn't wish to travel without her husband, so both decided to go. As for Justin O'Reilly, it was at Albuquerque I first saw him. It came out that he was taking a short holiday in California, and I heard talk about his visiting some place where he and his father had lived. I had the impression of his being a California man. Mr. Heron had helped O'Reilly to get into Congress. They weren't intimate, though I believe they're distantly related, but Mr. Heron wanted to see him before he went East, and wired for

O'Reilly to meet them at Albuquerque. When I arrived, expecting to find only Louis in the house, they were all there.

"It was a shock and a blow to me to see the Herons. I'd meant to lie, and tell Louis I'd come to him because I'd changed my mind, and liked him better than I thought. But to account for my sudden appearance, uninvited, to Dolores, who hated me, was another matter.

"She and her husband supposed I was living quietly at school, mourning for my dead brother. I had to make up a story quickly. I said that I'd lost my position, and hoped they would put me up at Albuquerque until I could get another. They couldn't turn me out that night. And Louis was fairly well again by that time. He was very glad to see me. I made the most of his welcome—for Stephen's sake. You see, I *had* to succeed! I wrote a note, and slipped it into Louis' hand. In it I hinted that I had something very particular to say to him. He must go to his own rooms as soon as he could—he had a whole suite to himself which he could shut off from the rest of the house. It was on the ground floor. I said I would go to him there.

"Now comes the most terrible part of my story. Roger, you may hate me when you've heard the rest! I went to Louis' room. He let me in. I told him that I had changed my mind. I would marry him if he wanted me to, but only on one condition. I said I'd heard from friends of Stephen's that Mr. Heron was keeping documents which concerned our dead father; that they were with other private papers, in the Albuquerque house, and in Louis' charge. If he would give the whole bundle to me to look over, and choose what I wished to take away, I'd be his wife whenever he wanted me.

"He tried to seize me in his arms, but I threatened to go away at once unless he kept quiet, and did as I told him. There was a packet of papers, he admitted, but he vowed to me that they were only business papers. They were compromising to John Heron, and would do him immense harm—worse than ever, now that he'd just come successfully through the courts—if they passed into enemy hands. I insisted that there must be something about my father. There could be no mistake, and unless Louis would let me look, I'd never marry him. He still objected, arguing that all the things were in one envelope, sealed with three seals, which must not be broken, or his sister and her husband would never forgive him.

"He went to his desk—we were in his sitting-room—and showed me a secret

drawer between two other drawers. He took out an envelope—you've seen it. 'I'll try to cut off the seals with a sharp knife,' he said, 'and I can stick them on again. While he spoke, he began looking for the knife he wanted, and I snatched at the envelope. But his fingers closed down on it. He laughed in my face. 'So that's your game!' he said. 'I'm not so soft as you thought!' But I struggled with him. I was strong; he was an invalid. He'd just been ill. When he realized that I was more than his match, his face looked like a devil's. I shall never forget it. 'You'll pay for this!' he screamed at the top of his voice—an awful scream—'Help! murder!'

"Overhead was what they called the living room. I knew he would be heard; people would come. I wrenched the envelope from him, and ran for the window. I dared not go to the door; I should meet someone and be caught. Louis grabbed my dress, shouting 'murder!' Then I seemed to go mad. I gave him a push, and he fell over a chair, and lay quite still. I rushed to the door, locked it, and took the key, to make a few minutes' delay. Then I jumped out of the window (I told you Louis' rooms were on the ground floor) and ran very fast. I won't stop now to tell you the adventures I had before I managed to dash into the Albuquerque railway station, at the last minute, after the train was in. Once in the train when I didn't see Louis, or Mr. Heron's secretary, or any one I expected to follow me, I began to hope that some other trail had been followed. It would have seemed more likely that I'd go back west, where I had friends, than travel east where I was a stranger. You promised to stand by me. Then you met Justin O'Reilly. I didn't dream Louis was dead. It was a week later, when you and I were married, that I saw in a newspaper about the beautiful Mrs. John Heron losing her brother suddenly, from heart disease. A date was mentioned: the night I took the envelope. Oh, Roger, I felt that I was guilty of his death. Even to save Stephen I could not have killed him. Do you think me a murderess? If you do, just let me go from your arms, and I shall understand. You needn't tell me in words."

Roger held her closer. "No, my darling," he said, "you're not a murderess. You didn't kill Louis Moreno. He couldn't have lived many weeks. The doctor had warned John Heron. I love you more than ever for what you've gone through. It's you who should hate me for my cruelty and—and my beastly suspicion. But there were some things that tried me rather hard. Why didn't you tell me this story long ago? Surely you could have trusted me to keep your secret?"

"Yes, I could have trusted you, even though it was Stephen's secret more than mine. But I had taken a double oath not to tell! First, I'd promised Stephen himself when he came back from the dead, never to give any hint of the truth.

Later, when he was kidnapped, I was obliged to swear another oath, on the memory of our dead parents, and my love for my brother, that I wouldn't betray Cheffinsky and his comrades. Now it's different. They have betrayed me. Stephen is dead. Such a girl as Clo Riley wouldn't have sent this message unless she knew for certain. He must have died just before that dreadful Sunday when all our unhappiness—yours and mine—began, Roger. To keep their hold over me, those men would have done all they could to save him till they had the papers they wanted to use, and ruin John Heron. Soon after you brought me to New York they found out about our marriage, and put 'personals' in the newspapers headed like those others in California: 'Steve's Sister.' They knew, of course, that their man, who should have met me in Chicago, had been prevented from coming—imprisoned on a charge which they called a 'frame-up' but I believe he must have picked someone's pocket and been arrested in the railway station. They still had power over me, although I was your wife, but I had power over them, too, because I'd got the papers they wanted. I answered the messages, and refused to give up what I had unless my brother fetched it. I hoped that would bring him. But he only wrote—a short letter. He said that he was safe for the time being, and was treated kindly. He would come when he could. Meanwhile, I 'must keep the papers and the secret'—and wait. I felt relieved after that! I dared to let myself be happy. Then, that Sunday, when Clo and I went out in the motor, a man was waiting for me in the street. He made me understand that he came from Stephen. His name was Peterson. He said the Comrades had changed their minds. They wouldn't let Stephen come to me. I must send the papers that night or my brother would die. When I asked the reason for the change, Peterson pretended not to know. Now, I understand at last. Stephen was dead already. Cheffinsky and the others had at last lost their hold over me and dared not wait longer. I sent the envelope to Peterson by Clo, to the Westmorland Hotel. Yes, the man who was murdered! That has been another horror for me. It was when I was taking the envelope to Clo, in the car, that I broke the rope of pearls, and dared not even stop to pick them up! I hoped that Stephen was saved—thanks to Clo—but, Roger, it was not the same envelope you took care of for me in the train. It had been changed. Inside, when Peterson opened it before Clo, he found only blank paper—writing paper of the Santa Fé Limited train. Clo puzzled the mystery out, and explained what might have happened when you and I left the train in Chicago—what must have happened. A clever trick of Justin O'Reilly's, working for the Herons."

"Justin O'Reilly! Damn him!" Roger broke out; but Beverley covered his lips with her hand.

"No. He wasn't to blame. He must have thought me a monster of ingratitude and treachery to the Herons. The moment they saw the secret drawer open they would all have guessed that I'd stolen the sealed envelope. It was the only thing kept there. If John Heron told O'Reilly what the contents were, he must have supposed I meant to make money by blackmailing. The reason the Herons were silent and left me alone, was that O'Reilly had managed to have you robbed of the envelope, at Chicago, where it was changed for another—another just like it, given him by Dolores, with her seal and gold wax. So they were safe. O'Reilly kept the right envelope, and it was safer with him than at Albuquerque. But they could never be sure whether you were in the affair with me or not. So, I have lost you the Herons' friendship."

"As if I cared!"

"And Justin O'Reilly has doubted you, and detested me. But he has been splendid to Clo, who went to his hotel and stole the real envelope out of his private safe and brought it here——"

"So that was it!" said Roger. "And in your boudoir I found the envelope addressed to him at his bank, and sent it back to the Dietz that night."

"Roger! It was you?"

"Yes. You are not the only one with a confession to make. There are many things I——"

"I don't want a confession from you!" she broke in. "Whatever you did was right. Even before you told me, I felt you knew about the pearls being gone——"

"Though I knew, I ought to have trusted you. I ought to have trusted you when I heard you telephone O'Reilly——"

"So you did hear! I was sure of it. I telephoned about Clo. He was helping her, and so, indirectly, helping me, though I'd seen him only when he brought her here that Sunday night, after she'd been to his hotel. Oh, Roger, you don't know what that child has done for me! Not only did she get back the envelope, and now the pearls—which Peterson stole—but she has gone through an ordeal terrible enough to kill most women, or drive them mad—that delicate girl! She may be in danger still—for she dropped the pearls in a bag out of a window in a shabby boarding-house where she has been watching a thief. Miss Blackburne has just told me. My one comfort is that a man, answering Justin O'Reilly's

description, got out of a motor car in front of the house, as Miss Blackburne came away. Clo tricked O'Reilly, and stole from him, and yet—I think she bewitched him. I think he'd risk his life to keep her from harm. I pray that he may bring her here, safe and sound."

"He's not likely to come to my house," Roger said. "I've just caused him the greatest disappointment of his life. I wanted to hurt him—and I found a way. By this time he must know what I've done. There's an old mansion in Gramercy Square built by O'Reilly's great-great-grandfather. Years ago there was a forced sale; and ever since Justin O'Reilly was a boy he has wanted to buy the house back. I have bought it. But I wish to heaven he would fall in love with this Clo of yours and marry her. I'd give them the deed of sale as a wedding present!"

Roger had sprung up, released by Beverley, and almost shouted the words of his inspiration. He had forgotten everything and everybody in the world except his wife, the girl who had helped her, and his own late enemy, whom he would now gladly welcome as his dearest friend. A knock brought him back to realities with a start; yet he felt half dazed as he opened the door, to face Léontine.

"The butler begged of me to come," said the Frenchwoman. "Is it the wish of Monsieur and Madame that dinner be still longer delayed?"

Roger turned and looked at Beverley, his hand on the door. "What shall we say?" he asked. "Shall I go down without you? Shall I explain that you've a headache ____"

"No," Beverley answered. She stood up, tall and very beautiful, though deadly pale. "I have no headache. I am quite well. Léontine, tell Johnson dinner may be served."

# XXXIX

## ON THE ROAD TO NEWPORT

Through the blue dusk of the June night a big gray limousine car bowled smoothly over the velvet road surface, with the moon overhead, and the sea making distant music. Turning a corner with a swing the limousine came upon another car, stationary and in trouble. A man in evening dress was holding an electric lamp for the chauffeur to peer under the bonnet, and standing beside him was a woman in black, wearing a filmy purple cloak.

"Want any help?" O'Reilly called from the window, while his chauffeur slowed down.

"No, thank you! We'll soon be all right," answered the man with the lamp. The light shone on his face, which was strange to O'Reilly, and on that of the woman, which, to his surprise, was familiar. "You can go on," he said to his chauffeur, in a low voice.

"Why, Mr. O'Reilly, it was Mrs. Heron!" Clo cried, sinking back reluctantly upon her comfortably rigged-up bed, after a long stare through the window.

"'Mr. O'Reilly,' indeed? Don't you realize I'm your husband?" Justin laughed at her.

"I'd forgotten," said Clo. "It's only since this morning, and we've had so many things to think of."

"I've thought of nothing but you. You seem to have thought of nothing but your Angel—and these Herons."

"It's the Herons I'm thinking of now," Clo confessed. "Why did you tell the man to go on?"

"Why, I like old John Heron, but I'm not a spoil-sport."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm wondering if Mrs. Heron and that chap are on their way to the Sands' ball. If

Heron doesn't mind letting them enjoy each other's company, why should I butt in?"

"Mr. Heron was in the car," Clo insisted gravely. "It was dark inside, but I saw his face at the window."

"You must have sharp eyes," said Justin. "The window looked black as a pocket to me."

"You think I imagined it. But I'm sure! Oh, Mr.—er—Justin, do let's go back and warn him! I have a presentiment that if we don't, it will be too late."

"Whatever you feel as if you must do shall be done," said Justin, with a tenderness in his voice of which few people would have believed him capable. "The doctor humoured you, and told me to, so here goes!" He called through the speaking-tube, and directed the chauffeur to turn. "Go back till you get within a few yards of that auto we passed hung up on the road," he added. And to Clo:

"Astonishing the interest you take in the Herons!" he teased.

"Not in them. In him. I don't think I like Mrs. Heron," she explained.

"You've worried about him ever since you came to yourself yesterday. But then, I'm used to John Heron's life being threatened. It used to happen about once a week. And he is alive to this day."

"I feel awfully responsible," said Clo. "You see, I heard Kit and Churn talking of the plot, and saying that Chuff was sure to have found someone else, after Pete died."

"I tried to get Heron three times on long distance yesterday," said O'Reilly, "and when he was always out, I wired."

"You couldn't explain clearly in the telegram."

"If you really saw him in the car, he's all right, up to date. There it is, still stranded. We shall soon know."

"Will you get out and talk to him seriously?" Clo urged.

"Yes. If it's he and not his ghost you saw. I'll get him to walk along the road with me, out of earshot from his wife."

The gray limousine slowed, and carefully stopped. The chauffeur had been told

that, for his life, he must not let the car jolt or jerk.

Justin kissed his bride of a few hours good-bye for a few minutes, and jumped out.

While Clo kissed her hand, almost timidly, because Justin had kissed it, Justin himself walked on to the other car.

"You!" exclaimed Dolores Heron. "So it was you in the limousine that hailed us? Funny I didn't recognize your voice, but the chauffeur's tinkering made such a noise——"

O'Reilly was about to ask for Heron when Dolores introduced him to Mr. Hammersley-Fisher. "He's our host at Narragansett, and is taking us over to Roger Sands,'" she said. "Jack's in the car, very bored. I believe he's gone to sleep."

"No, he hasn't," Heron's voice answered rather testily, for he secretly disliked Dolores' habit of calling him "Jack." "He's only waiting for a chance to speak!"

O'Reilly went to the window of the car, and shook hands with his friends.

"It's not possible that you're going to the Sands'?" Heron said.

"I should have made the same remark about you a few days ago," retorted O'Reilly. "But—circumstances have altered cases with us both."

"My wife is the circumstance that has altered my case," Heron replied, in the tone of a man with a grievance.

"So is mine!" returned Justin, in a purposely subdued tone.

"Your—what?"

"My wife. But let's take a walk. Your friend's auto won't be ready to move for some time, I should judge."

The elder man, who had been feeling ill and tired, sprang out of the car with a sudden increase of liveliness. Dolores and Hammersley-Fisher stood with their backs to the two men. Heron's wife turned for a glance, but let them walk away without a question. She was flirting with her host.

Dolores was saying to Hammersley-Fisher: "I dislike Mrs. Roger Sands intensely. I wouldn't dream of going to her house if her husband hadn't at one

time done quite a service—legally, I mean—to mine. I don't often talk like this about people I'm going to visit. But if I could tell you the things that woman has done you wouldn't blame me."

To O'Reilly Heron was repeating, as they walked along:

"Your wife, did you say?"

"I did say. But before I go on I've a question or so to ask. You got my wire, advising you to be careful, and hinting that some of the old lot had bobbed up along your life line?"

"Yes. We were out all the afternoon. I found the wire this evening when we got back to Hammersley-Fisher's place to dress for this show at Roger Sands'. Now will you tell me——"

"I'll tell you this, that my opinion of Mrs. Roger Sands has changed. You shall hear why presently. I rather think it will give you pleasure to change yours—when you can conscientiously. As for Sands himself, I've learned that we have both done him an injustice in regard to those papers."

"How have you learned all this?"

"From the same person who wished me to put you on your guard—made me call you up at Narragansett, and wire when I couldn't reach you by 'phone!"

"Who is this person?"

"My wife. And if you want to know who she is——"

"I most certainly do."

"I could introduce you to her in about two minutes if I weren't afraid of her giving you another shock."

"Another—shock?"

"As she did on the Sunday night at our hotel when you had your—little attack. Heron, I've married that girl; the most wonderful girl in the world."

Heron stopped short.

"That girl!—you—have—*married* that girl?"

"Yes," said Justin, "I married her this morning. So, if you'd been inclined to forbid the banns, you're too late."

For an instant Heron did not speak. But when words came, he seemed to fling them at his friend: "You're not joking when you say that, O'Reilly. You have a meaning. What's in your mind?"

"Perhaps—the same thing that's in yours, Heron."

"Speak out plainly."

"I'm not prepared to do that without encouragement. You and I are both of Irish blood, Heron, so you know as well as I do that imagination gets out of hand now and then with us Celtic folk. We generally flatter ourselves it's second sight, whereas it may be—just nothing at all."

"I give you leave to speak."

"Long ago, when I first knew you, while my father was still alive, and before you married Miss Moreno, you once came to stop with us. You were run down and ill. My father thought we could do you good. One day you spoke rather frankly about a certain incident in your past. Never since have we mentioned that conversation, and I never expected to do so again. Yesterday I heard the story of another incident which matched it about as perfectly as two bits of a broken coin can join together. This second incident concerned two Irish girls. The first died years ago. The second—is my wife."

"And the first was mine."

"I was wondering. You see, that collapse of yours on Sunday night wasn't like you, in the normal course of things. It had to be accounted for, and so——"

"The girl told you!"

"She told me that she'd met outside my door a tall man with red hair and beard, and extraordinary eyes that pierced her through and through. She told me that, after she'd walked on to a stone ledge from my window to yours, and climbed in there——"

"Great Heavens!"

"I mentioned that she was the most wonderful girl in the world. You'll hear the story some day. She didn't know who you were, then. When she learned your

name, although she wasn't conscious of having heard it in the past, it affected her strangely. She seemed to associate it with wakeful nights in her early childhood, and the sound of a woman's sobs in the dark."

"Don't, Justin. I can't stand any more—now. The sight of her face that Sunday at the Dietz—the ghostliness of her, in my locked room—I thought I was haunted."

"Would you like to see her again, and judge for yourself whether——"

"Take me to her," Heron broke in.

They started on again toward the gray limousine drawn up at the roadside only a few yards away; but before they had gone a dozen steps Heron stopped O'Reilly once more.

"Does she know?" he asked abruptly.

"I have said nothing to her," Justin assured him. "She cannot know. Yet I think, what one would call her 'subconscious self' is aware of a tie between you and herself. She's Celtic, too! She hasn't been able to rest since she learned (in a way you shall hear about later) that your life was threatened. I'm certain that something above Fate has brought us three together on the road to-night. I didn't see you in the car. She saw you. She made me turn back."

Without another word Heron began to walk very fast. Justin kept at his side, but did not speak until they had nearly reached the car which contained Clo. Then he warned Heron hastily that the girl had had an accident. "That is," he corrected himself, dryly, "she was shot by the leader of the band that's after you. If you want to tell her here and now what you think you are to each other, I don't forbid it. Happy news seldom hurts. (By the by, she explained to me that she came over to America because she thought the States looked small on the map, and she might meet her American father!) Go gently with her, that's all I ask."

"You give me leave to talk to her—as I wish?"

"Yes. But—what about Mrs. Heron? Is she——"

"Oh, later, I must tell her. To-night I want it to rest between ourselves. But, O'Reilly, I can't go on with my wife and that fellow, Hammersley-Fisher, to the Sands'—after this! What am I to do? Think for me. I can think only—of one thing."

"When I've introduced you to my wife" (each time O'Reilly spoke those two words it was with tenderness and pride) "I'll go back to Hammersley-Fisher's car and suggest that he take Mrs. Heron on, while we follow later, if you like."

"For heaven's sake, do."

They had reached the gray limousine. Justin opened the door. "Clo, here is my old friend, John Heron, come to see you," he announced.

"Clo! Her name's not 'Clodagh,' is it?" the question leapt from Heron's lips.

"It was one of my mother's names, Mr. Heron."

"And your voice is her voice!" he exclaimed. "Your face is her face." He had not meant to begin in this way; but the moment was too big for him when Clo switched on an electric lamp, and the light framed her in silver. Justin silently moved away, leaving the two to make acquaintance as Fate led.

Next morning the newspapers all over the country were head-lined with a new sensation. Mrs. John Heron, of California, had arrived rather late, on account of an accident to the car of Mr. Hammersley-Fisher, who had been entertaining the Herons at Narragansett. Mr. Heron, owing to indisposition, had remained behind, and only the lady's host had accompanied her to the ball. At the moment of their entrance a dance, given by several famous Russian professionals, was nearly ended. An extra dancer had accompanied the party as an understudy of one of its members who feared a breakdown. Not being called upon to dance, he had taken up his station near the door, and must have known Mrs. John Heron by sight, though not her husband. When she came in, accompanied by Hammersley-Fisher, he shot the latter through the breast, calling out in English: "Take that, John Heron, for your sins against the Comrades!"

Unfortunately the Russian—or pretended Russian—was allowed to escape in the confusion, but the police had hopes of getting upon his track. Mr. Hammersley-Fisher was seriously, but not fatally, injured. All the guests of Mr. and Mrs. Sands, with the exception of four, had left, that the house might be kept quiet for the invalid.

The four who remained were Mr. and Mrs. John Heron, Justin O'Reilly, and Justin O'Reilly's wife.

THE END

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